

Classical Studies

2012 Chief Assessor's Report



Government
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SACE
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CLASSICAL STUDIES

2012 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

OVERVIEW

Chief Assessor's reports give an overview of how students performed in the 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, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Folio

Knowledge and Understanding

Many students displayed excellent knowledge of the classical world in their folio, showing the strong teaching and learning that had taken place during the program. However some students need to work on deepening their understanding to display their higher order thinking. Some students did not always demonstrate an appreciation or understanding of the importance of contextual understanding, particularly in making comparisons to modern times, for example, in discussions about religious beliefs or the position of women. Some did not take account of the multiple readings and different interpretations of ideas and practices applicable to various aspects of the classical world, and this was evident, for example, in students' use of generalisations, such as statements about 'all women'.

Teachers are reminded that the tasks they set, such as short-answer questions, should allow students to achieve at the highest level against the performance standards, and that choosing the most appropriate performance standards can help in achieving this. This year, some tasks did not allow students to select facts discerningly or to reflect with insight. Less successful answers for tasks that required empathy were noticeably superficial in approach.

Research and Analysis

The better folio pieces displayed thorough and balanced research. They used a mixture of resources, for example, books, articles, documentaries, and the Internet, and did not rely solely on sites such as Wikipedia or Think Quest. Students who questioned the findings of their research when appropriate were able to synthesise and reflect on their research.

Most students used secondary research, but the most successful folios used a variety and balance of primary and secondary sources. Students who wrote stronger pieces actually interrogated the primary sources they cited, which allowed them to reflect insightfully on their research. Unfortunately, many responses lacked such analysis and synthesis. Some students were too selective in their supporting evidence, leading to answers that were not particularly balanced.

To help students deepen their learning and achieve at the highest levels, teachers should avoid setting tasks that rely on pure recount (such as biographies or simple accounts of a battle), as they do not invite analysis. Some creative writing tasks, especially in the topics under Section B: Society, Culture, and History, did not allow students to show the research and analysis they had completed. The better answers to these types of assignment used appropriate language and developed ideas rather than straight narratives. Students are reminded to be careful when referencing modern films; it is important to engage with the constructed nature of the film, as one particular representation of the past, rather than treating it as a definitive source.

Students' use of specific terminology improved in comparison to 2011, as they were able to use correctly most of the appropriate terms in both Sections A and B. Most students also included clear and correct referencing in their work, as well as a correctly cited bibliography.

Communication

Communication within the folio was generally good. The majority of students could use the required form for the set task and had carefully edited their written work. Formal essays were often not written as well as some of the other forms. The better essays established the central contentions in the opening paragraphs and followed the lines of argument throughout. They also deftly integrated supporting evidence from the literary texts for Section A responses, or from the appropriate primary and secondary sources for Section B responses.

Moderators encountered many different forms of work in the folios, for example, orals, research assignments, narratives, and newspaper recreations. It was good to see a diversity of tasks and a range of forms being used in the folio. However, project-style assignments with pictures that did not apply directly to the topic were not as successful and generally did not provide scope for achievement at the highest level across the performance standards.

Assessment Type 2: Essays

Student performance in this assessment type was not as strong as in Assessment Type 1, possibly indicating less thorough preparation. Students tended to achieve lower results against the performance standards when they were required to write under pressure. More practice and judicious teacher scaffolding may help students to understand how to work under timed conditions to achieve higher grades. The least successful essays lacked a strong argument and tended towards narration.

Knowledge and Understanding

Stronger answers displayed deep knowledge and understanding in their deft use of examples appropriate to the task and their critical understanding of the key issues. They could acknowledge, explain, and reflect on the diversity of the ancient world. Some comparisons between Sparta and Athens were particularly effective.

Research and Analysis

In this assessment type, teachers did not select specific features RA1, RA2, and RA3 very frequently. In the essays where these were included, students handled them quite well.

Stronger essays were distinguished by effective definition and development of a point of view. They were well structured, with each paragraph having a good topic sentence followed by a solid development of the argument. These essays ended with a logical conclusion, and tended to be over 800 words in length. The least successful answers tended towards narration, relying on recount of examples rather than offering analysis and argument. Students should ensure that they respond to the terms of the question, clearly support their contention with appropriate evidence, and analyse and synthesise their research.

Many teachers used past exam questions, which encouraged students to clearly analyse a question. Clear task design, where the students are provided with an opportunity to demonstrate incisive critical analysis and synthesis, is very important.

Students were usually able to make competent and appropriate use of terms and concepts.

Communication

Students tend to write more colloquially when under pressure. Responses that achieved well against this criterion were written in a formal style and provided evidence using appropriate sources.

Students struggled to incorporate source material in this assessment type. Many paraphrased rather than quoted, and while this is acceptable, it could, and did, lead to some essays becoming too narrative. Other students limited their answers by using evidence that was not really applicable. Because students complete their essays under timed conditions, it is not necessary for the essays to have a bibliography, and referencing, when appropriate (for example, the author or title of a source for Section B responses) is desirable but not mandatory.

Students who took time to plan their essays were able to structure a better argument. Some inconsistent responses started promisingly but became significantly weaker towards the end. More practice with writing under pressure before the actual timed response may help with this. It is important to remember that the subject outline states that one hour should be allowed for each essay; this includes the time for reading, planning, and editing the essay.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 3: Special Study

General Comments

Most investigations were well researched and thoughtfully argued. Students were able to state a case and produce evidence to support their argument. Most understood the importance of using appropriate evidence and sources to support their point of view. Bibliographies were usually accurately recorded and in-text referencing was extensively used. There was a sense of student engagement and even passion in nearly all studies.

Choice of Topics

Markers commented that a greater number of studies this year were far too broad in their scope, for example, general studies of how religion affected people's lives in Ancient Greece. Students are encouraged to develop a carefully focused question. Some biographical studies, often of Alexander the Great or Cleopatra, tended towards uncritical recount, drawn from sources of dubious quality. The more successful investigations acknowledged the limitations of their sources.

Students are encouraged to set manageable limits, for example, a discussion of 'Ancient Rome' is far too broad in some instances. They could, for example, limit their topic to the Republic or the Empire, which would begin to demonstrate their awareness of the different eras. The better studies did show a good awareness of context and chronology; less successful studies made obvious mistakes because they lacked this awareness.

Popular topics included biographies, other historical and social topics (e.g. slavery), the lives of women, and the lives of gladiators. Comparative topics remained reasonably popular, including aspects of Ancient Greece and Egypt. They were wide-ranging in scope and included comparisons of, for example, classical and contemporary literature, and Spartan and Nazi ideology. Some essays proposed an argument about the influence of the classical world on the modern but largely ignored the complexities of tracing causation, change, and continuity.

Very few good essays resulted from topics that focused on films set in the classical world. The most common approach in these responses was to look at how realistically the film depicted actual events. Few students applied effective analysis, but rather engaged in narrative comparisons between the films and events researched in students' set texts. The representation of the classical world today is a valid topic of study but requires considered reflection and analysis.

While there were some sophisticated and interesting studies that focused on religion, there were an increasing number of problematic studies of religion, for example, discussion of the impact of Zeus on Greek civilisation and modern civilisation. Students who are interested in these areas need careful guidance to focus the topic and word the question appropriately, and they also need a solid understanding of religion as a complex system of beliefs and practices.

Knowledge and Understanding

Student knowledge of, and engagement with, their topic was generally sound, and showed evidence of some research, but the level of student understanding of the topic varied considerably. Students who chose social, military, or literary topics tended to show a better understanding. Religious and political institutions were often not well canvassed. The choice of sources did shape the depth of understanding. Students who relied entirely on generic electronic sources wrote more superficially.

The selection and application of factual knowledge proved to be a particularly effective point of differentiation in assessing this assessment task. The most successful answers displayed a thoughtful selection, organisation, and completeness of data in relation to the task at hand, while many essays replicated the material of secondary sources and needed to return to the question. A few included irrelevant material, for example, information about Nero that was not relevant to a discussion of the collapse of the Roman Empire.

Where recognition and reflection on the diversity of attitudes, beliefs, and values in the classical world was relevant, most students were conscious of the need to avoid generalising about attitudes. Overall, students demonstrated a degree of empathy and recognition that values were different in different societies.

Research and Analysis

Almost all students accessed both primary and secondary sources in completing their study. More recognition of bias, especially in the primary sources, would have been useful, but the most successful studies demonstrated students' clear understanding of the strengths and limitations of literary texts and other primary sources. Students continue to use the Internet to obtain both primary and secondary sources, and weaker responses often used only online information, extracted from more generic sources. The highest achieving students used an impressive range of journal articles, as well as other more specialist print and non-print sources, employing them to build their learning in a sustained and reflective way. In most cases, students' print sources were the standard general texts on Greece and Rome, and occasionally a popular biography.

Analysis and reflection tended to be informed or well-informed rather than incisive, though the best responses demonstrated a qualified but non-judgemental engagement, using evidence dispassionately and with forensic skill to make telling points. In most studies, the level of engagement with material became less purposeful in the course of the discussion, and this tended to lead to a less focused and purposeful use of sources (although such material was still relevant in places). The least successful responses tended to focus too much on narration of factual detail.

Students rarely offered reflective criticism of sources. Usually sources were simply used to "prove" a statement, or even to make a statement at times. Very few students identified a silence in the records and reflected on what such a silence might mean. In the best studies, students did question the attitudes of primary sources, but this was rare. Secondary sources were rarely compared to point out differences in perspectives.

The better studies demonstrated a good command of subject-specific vocabulary. Students could appropriately use the Greek and/or Latin terms, for example, for religious practices or battle-gear or the class system. However, skills of historical literacy should have been used more frequently. Knowledge of chronology and geography helps with basic understanding of actions and reactions, and this was often missing from less successful investigations. The class systems of both Greece and Rome were frequently ignored, and this was particularly evident in a number of investigations into the lives of women in Athens.

The best studies had very clearly and thoroughly argued points of view. Most students clearly established a point of view in their first paragraph, and returned to that statement in their conclusion. Some found it difficult to develop their argument in the body of the essay, perhaps because of a lack of planning or a perceived lack of material. Repetition was a problem for some. Some departed from their stated argument to make broader comparisons and drew in irrelevant information. The problem here appeared to be a lack of relevant material rather than a lack of understanding about how to argue a case. Some excellent questions were developed but students did not always exploit them properly; other questions had obvious

problems and would have benefited from rephrasing; some students would have been better advised to choose a different question.

Communication

Communication was, on the whole, clear and accurate. The best answers were tightly and cogently written, with carefully chosen and sourced references. Keeping to the word-limit was a challenge for such students, although they did make a strongly developed argument and demonstrate their in-depth knowledge and critical understanding. The best answers employed appropriate formal and polished language, displaying an impressive and disciplined vocabulary. The less successful answers relied on description or recount. Some of these studies contained informal language or even slang terms, which did show some engagement in the subject, albeit in a limited way. Greater use of complex sentence structures, especially through the careful use of appropriate conjunctions, would help with the development of the argument. A small number of students misrepresented their word counts, sometimes by over 500 words.

Most students integrated their sources into their arguments, and very few confined themselves only to descriptions. Some students over-quoted, including slabs of extracted material rather than a selected line or phrase, and a number of students used quotes to 'tell the story' and not to prove or reinforce a stated point of view. Some used photographs and images as sources, especially when discussing artefacts or buildings, and referred to them appropriately in support of their arguments. A small number included unnecessary illustrative material.

Bibliographies were usually well constructed and appropriately detailed, although some students needed to be more familiar with the conventions of footnoting. A few studies only provided a list of web addresses, or did not use footnotes or in-text referencing. Students are advised to use references judiciously, for example, remembering that it is not necessary to footnote every accepted date. In some essays, students listed sources in the bibliography that had not been used in the essay and that seemed to have little to do with the topic. Conversely, some sources appeared in the essay but were not listed in the bibliography.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

School Assessment

This year, some clerical errors were found in a few of the moderation bundles. As only one external assessment results sheet is required to be submitted, it is important that teachers check their results carefully before submitting them. They should also ensure that all the required material is submitted. Proof of completed oral tasks, in the form of cue cards, transcripts, or video or audio recordings, needs to be presented to support teachers' assessment decisions. Moderators noted that it was helpful when the appropriate task sheet was attached to each assignment.

The moderators greatly appreciated that so many teachers conscientiously packaged the moderation materials.

External Assessment

Almost all schools used the external assessment cover sheet (available on the SACE Board website) and had carefully ensured all external materials were de-identified,

with the strict use of SACE registration numbers only, for both students and the school. Teachers are reminded that no marking annotations or grades should appear on students' special study materials.

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