

Examiners' report

A LEVEL

CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

**OCR Level 3 Advanced GCE in
Classical Civilisation**

H408

For first teaching in 2017

H408/11 Summer 2025 series

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate responses is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from [Teach Cambridge](#).

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Paper 11 series overview

Candidates' enthusiasm for the subject was as clear as ever and it was most evident that much time and care had been spent in preparing them over the last two years. The paper allowed candidates to showcase their knowledge and understanding at all different levels. Those who had spent time preparing for the assessment were able to demonstrate this most effectively and performed the best; there was scope, however, for those with less knowledge to demonstrate what they knew in a successful way.

Timing was much better, but there were still a number struggling to complete the paper, especially Question 7, which was often left to last.

The 20 and 30 mark questions were all questions of two halves – dull or dutiful, Odysseus or Penelope, father/son versus other familial relationships, etc. Candidates need to consider both halves in their answers.

Many candidates did not use paragraphing as a useful technique to organise and clarify their responses.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
• knew the epics in a detailed manner • did not spend too long on one question • finished the paper • read the questions carefully and answered accordingly • used paragraphs – new point, new paragraph • knew whether a question needed a counter-argument or not.	• ran out of time • for 10 mark questions, wrote at excessive length in developing a single point and so wasted time • for 20 mark questions, spent time trying to weave in and discuss references to scholarly research – this often resulted in over-long responses to the 20 mark questions to the detriment of other responses.

Section A overview

There was much good work in this section and many candidates had been clearly well prepared on how to tackle these types of question, especially Questions 1 and 3.

The most successful responses to Questions 2 and 4 were those which led by the AO2, not the AO1. The latter were good at recalling examples of death/revenge, but struggled to make meaningful points.

Question 1

1 Explain how far you think Achilles is shown to be admirable in **Passage A**.

Use references to the passage to support your answer.

[10]

This was mostly answered well. Most candidates identified Achilles' admirable qualities and were able to support analysis with accurate reference to the text and development of points. Many candidates identified Achilles' skill as a warrior, his savage cruelty and the support he receives from the gods. The most successful answers identified a wide range of admirable or not admirable qualities and supported them with accurate quotation. Work done by candidates and their teachers in answering technique to 10 mark questions was successfully applied in the majority of answers. In general terms, candidates should aim to identify admirable/not admirable traits from the passage and then support this with relevant quotation from the passage. Finally, the most successful answers explained exactly how the chosen example demonstrated the admirable/not admirable qualities of the hero. This last part was essential to gain all of the marks. Some less successful responses did not pick up that the simile was about Achilles' spear not him or misidentified the words spoken at the start of the passage. A few simply quoted from the passage and said this was admirable without discussing why, which made it difficult to award AO2 marks.

Question 2*

2* 'Evil death.' Evaluate whether you think this is a fair description of the way death is presented in the *Iliad*.

You may use **Passage A** as a starting point, and your knowledge of the *Iliad* in your answer. [20]

The majority of answers were focused on the question and showed good analysis of the 'evil' qualities of death in the *Iliad*, most commonly including comment on the horror of death and the grief it causes for loved ones, particularly the Trojans following Hector's death and Achilles following Patroklos' death. Many answers showed a sensitive appreciation of the grief and grim fate of women and children following a hero's death and of the glimpses of the lives of several minor heroes that are killed. The most successful answers included focused counter-argument mentioning such ideas as the opportunities to win *kleos*, some used *time*, a more appropriate word, and the inevitability of death including the role of the gods in death's impersonal embrace. Better answers appreciated and articulated the paradox that without war and the jeopardy of death there can be no honour and glory.

Question 3

3 Explain how far you think Odysseus is shown to be admirable in **Passage B**.

Use references to the passage to support your answer.

[10]

As with Question 1 most candidates were able to identify a good range of admirable qualities of Odysseus with precise reference to detail from the passage in support. The most popular qualities identified were Odysseus' piety, his skill as an archer and his cunning planning. A number of candidates extended their analysis to counter-argument including ideas such as Odysseus' brutality in killing in cold blood an unarmed and entirely unaware Antinous. As was the case for the *Iliad* 10 mark question, a few simply quoted from the passage and said this was admirable without discussing why or spent too long developing a single point, again resulting in a low AO2 score.

Question 4*

4* 'Revenge matters'. Explain why revenge is important in the *Odyssey* and evaluate how it adds to the success of the story.

You may use **Passage B** as a starting point, and your knowledge of the *Odyssey* in your answer.

[20]

Most candidates extended their reference beyond Odysseus and the Suitors to include Polyphemus and Poseidon. The most successful answers went beyond this and included reference to additional examples such as the disloyal servants, the Sun-god and Odysseus' men, and the ship of the Phaeacians that was turned to stone. In analysis most discussed the consequences of the violation of *xenia* and the importance to the plot of the disruption to Odysseus' *nostos* by Poseidon's revenge. The most successful answers went further and examined the literary benefits of revenge, evaluating how the revenge aids excitement and brings both a climax to the story and a satisfying sense of closure to Odysseus' enactment of justice.

Misconception



There is no need for a counter-argument in the way this question is worded.

Exemplar 1

		One could argue that 'revenge is important in the Odyssey because it of the dramatic effect and suspense it adds to the plot. For example, we are aware of the suitors and their distasteful behaviour from the the start, particularly emphasised in Book 1 and the rest of the Telemachy. There are passages where they 'wear out' not just Telemachus, as Athena notes, but Penelope's longevity to stand up against (which she does successfully for a number of years with the clever weaving trick) the suitors and their relentless pining over and for her. The resources are also being worn out and used, as they are described by Telemachus as 'eating and drinking me out of my home'. This is then set up against Odysseus' homecoming story which parallels this narrative, we as readers know that how much Odysseus loved Ithaca, 'weeping' for it at times, so only
		know that there must be a revenge scene coming for how the suitors have degraded the palace in Ithaca. This is important in adding to the success of the story because it keeps readers engaged and prompted to read onwards, potentially an even reason as to why the the epic has stayed relevant in both classical and and contemporary periods.

Exemplar 1 is a good example of a response which is leading with the AO2. The AO2 point which the candidate leads with is the dramatic effect and suspense which revenge creates. This is followed by a range of relevant details (AO1) from the epic and concludes with a neat explanation as to how and why this adds to the success of the narrative.

Section B overview

This section was well-completed and timing was less of an issue than in previous years.

Many candidates clearly possessed a detailed knowledge and understanding of the *Aeneid*.

Some responses to Question 6 would have benefited from extending their discussion beyond just father/son relationships and made reference and comparison to other familial bonds.

Question 5

5 Explain how Turnus is presented in a sympathetic way in **Passage C**.

Use references to the passage to support your answer and consider both what happens and the way it is written. **[10]**

There were several very good answers to this question. Many candidates included analysis both of content and style, and had clearly received good advice from their teachers in answering technique. Ideally, candidates should have picked out a point as to why/how sympathy is created for Turnus. This should have been supported by a relevant example from the passage which was explored and explained as to how the sympathy was created.

A number of candidates identified the anaphora in lines 7-8 and made relevant comment on the significance of the simile in lines 1-4. Also, many candidates successfully identified the contrast between the threat of Aeneas and his deadly spear and the increasingly downtrodden Turnus in the second half of the passage. There was some good interpretation and analysis of Virgil's use of 'we' to put the audience in Turnus' position. Less successful responses recounted the story of the passage with no comment and a number unnecessarily made reference to the baldric and how this detracted from any sympathy felt for Turnus.

Misconception



There is no need for a counter-argument in the way this question is worded.

Assessment for learning



It could be very worthwhile spending the last few minutes of a lesson looking at a range of questions and deciding whether they need a counter-argument or not.

Question 6*

- 6* 'The bond between a father and a son is the most powerful family relationship in the *Aeneid*.'
Evaluate how far you agree with this statement.

You may use **Passage C** as a starting point, and your knowledge of the *Aeneid* in your answer. [20]

The most successful answers identified a range of father-son relationships and used in counter-argument other familial relationships as a comparison. Most answers included Aeneas-Anchises, Aeneas-Ascanius and Evander-Pallas. Venus-Aeneas was the most common relationship in counter-arguments.

The best analysis went beyond love and emotion and related the relationships under discussion to such ideas as support of Aeneas' destiny, the concept of love beyond death and the devastating loss of sons in war. The best evaluation weighed the importance of different types of relationship mostly (but not always) signifying the pre-eminence of father-son relationships in the epic.

Assessment for learning



A number of candidates would have benefited if they had defined how they were interpreting what was meant by a powerful relationship. There was lots of good recall of the various relationships but far less analysis of what made them powerful. A little time practising 'unpacking' questions in class might be useful for candidates.

Section C overview

Question 7: Focus on the passages was much better this year. Timing is still an issue for some candidates with Question 7, especially those who had left this to last. The majority, however, successfully adopted a comparative approach between the two passages.

Questions 8-10: On the whole, these were well-handled and completed in a detailed and informed manner. Question 9 was misread by a handful of candidates.

Question 10 proved the most popular.

Scholarship: For all essays, knowledge of scholars was on the whole good. Most answers showed knowledge of the ideas of at least two scholars and many answers included reference to more.

The use of scholars, however, is meant to enhance the overall quality of the essay; the essay is not meant to be based around the scholars. The focus of any essay has to be on the epics themselves. Too much reference to scholars often has a negative effect. Candidates are only expected to make reference to at least two different named scholars. It is perhaps too much where essays are including scholars in every other paragraph, or that there are more references to secondary scholarship than to the epic themselves. Often, candidates are also 'forcing' quotations to fit the essay which are not really relevant to the question asked. This can derail the direction of the argument and set the candidate off away from the question being asked.

Question 7

7 Assess which passage you consider to be the more dramatic.

You should refer to the passage from the *Aeneid* **and** the passage from the work of Homer you have read. **[10]**

Most candidates were able to identify dramatic moments in the passages under examination and analyse their significance. The most successful answers made focused comparisons throughout and closely compared detail and outcomes in coming to an overall conclusion. Reference to detail was often good and analysis included the similarities and differences in treatment of such ideas as the presentation of surprise and inevitability, the build-up of tension and the use of figurative language such as simile. This year's cohort had clearly benefited from sound teaching on how to approach the comparative nature of the task. The overall quality of responses to this type of question was significantly higher than last year.

Question 8*

8* 'Men need women just as much as women need men.'

Evaluate how far you agree with this statement about the relationships between mortal men and mortal women in the *Iliad*. [30]

This was often answered well. Many candidates showed a firm understanding of relevant content and developed sensitive and comprehensive arguments in answer. The best answers analysed the needs of women and men in more or less equal measure and showed understanding of Homeric concepts of the social and religious responsibilities of women and the obligations of war for men. These answers were able to illustrate their analysis with a reference to a range of relevant characters and make reference to a range of roles and responsibilities. Some responses showed the whole war was started over a woman, as was Achilles' rage. There was interesting discussion as to how much Menelaus and Paris loved Helen or how much she was merely a status symbol. A few, however, went beyond the mortal realms and unnecessarily included discussion of the immortals – candidates should read the questions very carefully and take note of aspects of the epic which are relevant and irrelevant to consider.

Question 9*

9* 'Athene is more important to Odysseus than she is to Penelope.'

Evaluate how far you agree with this statement. [30]

A few candidates misunderstood the question and incorrectly based their answers on the importance of both Athene and Penelope to Odysseus rather than the correct approach of the importance of Athene to both mortals.

Misconception



As the commentary above shows, it is important that candidates take a moment to carefully read an essay question and then think over how to respond before starting their answer.

When answered relevantly, many responses showed good understanding of the importance of Athene to Odysseus and were often able to provide several examples of help and assistance that Athene provides to him throughout the text – release from Ogygia, provision of disguise, help in the battle against the Suitors. Several were less certain on the specific help provided to Penelope by Athene in which case they often focused on Penelope's self-reliance and on Athene's more general support to her through the return of her husband and the development of the maturity of Telemachus.

Many nuanced responses showed that in helping Odysseus, Athene was also actually providing more critical help to Penelope and so it could be argued was more important to Penelope. There was also subtle work on how Athene's help in developing Telemachus' character indirectly helped Penelope who would now have a man in the palace.

Question 10*

10* 'Aeneas: always dutiful, always dull.'

Evaluate how far you agree with this statement.

[30]

This was the most popular essay question. The question gave candidates plenty of opportunity to write about Aeneas' duty and mission and to analyse his more unpredictable characteristics. Most candidates sensibly kept their focus on duty and dullness (or the lack thereof) and many were able to produce coherent and structured argument often comparing Aeneas' growing sense of duty in the narrative with his frequent bouts of passion and *furor*. Many deemed him a complex character and not a cardboard puppet.

There was some mileage in arguing that to a Roman audience Aeneas reflection of Augustan values would have been seen as dutiful and far from dull.

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