Ancient Studies Subject Assessment Advice

Overview

Subject assessment advice, based on the previous year’s 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 in the new subject outline to engage with cultures outside of Greece and Rome with success. Many courses featured study in ancient Egypt 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, especially for topics outside of the Greek and Roman world as there was generally a lack of academic sources utilised by students and a heavy reliance on internet sites and blogs as the only sources to support ideas developed in assessments.
* Teachers are reminded that the new Ancient Studies course has a focus on the evaluation and usefulness of source material in KU3 and A3. 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 the 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 design tasks to supports students to define a clear and specific focus for their connections task to enable a deep and authentic exploration of ideas or innovations.
* 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, limited student ability to engage in detail with the material and demonstrate in-depth and critical understanding.
* For more successful timed responses, teachers are encouraged to strike a balance between providing source material which enables students to build on their own developed knowledge of the topic studied and providing extensive text excerpts which possibly hinder students to engage deeply within the set time limit.

School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Skills and Applications

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.

Assessment Type 2: Connections

The more successful responses commonly:

* could make authentic connections and move beyond similarities and differences
* chose one or two specific connections to discuss in detail avoiding broad sweeping generalisations or by trying to include too many facets of a civilisation
* 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.

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
* 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.

Student samples submitted for moderation should include all pieces of work for all tasks in an assessment type.

External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Investigation

* It was pleasing to see the new course has opened-up the scope of inquiry questions. Students embraced the freedom to move outside the traditional studies on Greece and Rome, so it was refreshing to see students venture into interesting studies of Egypt, India, China, Japan and the Middle East.
* 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.
* Inquiries that embraced the spirit of the new subject outline moved beyond a content approach and engaged with how to approach the past. In this respect students must be vigilant in remembering their job is to present material, explain how they know what they do, and with how much certainty they can argue what they know.
* 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.