



Department
for Education

Classical civilisation

GCSE subject content

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The content for GCSE classical civilisation

Introduction

1. GCSE subject content sets out the knowledge, understanding and skills common to all GCSE specifications in a given subject. They provide the framework within which the awarding body creates the detail of the specification.

Aims and objectives

2. GCSE specifications in classical civilisation should provide students with a broad, coherent and rewarding study of the literature and culture of the classical (Greco-Roman) world drawn from the time period 3000 BCE to 500 CE. Specifications should also help them to understand the legacy of the classical world, and its relevance to contemporary culture. GCSEs in classical civilisation should develop students' knowledge and skills in preparation for further educational opportunities including A level classical civilisation.

3. GCSE specifications in classical civilisation should enable students to:

- gain a broad knowledge and understanding of a range of literary and cultural materials from the classical world and the ability to use these to acquire knowledge and understanding of aspects of the classical world
- use their knowledge, in conjunction with their analytical and evaluative skills, in order to gain insight into the classical world from the literary and material culture studied
- demonstrate an informed response to the material studied, selecting a range of appropriate evidence to support an argument
- develop awareness of how classical sources reflect issues relevant to both the classical world and today, such as questions of gender, belief, sexuality and citizenship

Subject content

4. GCSE specifications in classical civilisation must require students to study ancient literature and visual/material culture from both Rome and its surrounding world, and Greece and its surrounding world. Topics or sources for study must be drawn from the time period from 3000 BCE to 500 CE.

5. Specifications in GCSE classical civilisation must require students to:

- study ancient literature (in translation), and visual/material culture as the focus of the course of study. Literature must form a minimum of 30% of the specification and visual/material culture must form a minimum of 20% of the specification

6. Specifications must require that this study of literature and visual/material culture:
- relate to both Rome and its surrounding world; and Greece and its surrounding world. Each should form a minimum of 20% of the assessed content over the full course of the qualification
 - include a comparative, thematic study, worth at least 20% of the specification over the full course of the qualification. This study must:
 - involve a meaningful level of comparison, examining two or more societies¹ which are distinctly different and offering, as appropriate, contrasting attitudes, cultures, beliefs, laws and infrastructures. Specifications must include a rationale for how the chosen societies enable comparison and engagement with the chosen theme. These societies can differ either:
 - geographically (studying for example both Rome and Greece; or Rome OR Greece and a neighbouring, distinct culture with which they interacted; or two Greek city states); or
 - temporally (studying two time periods more than 50 years apart with distinctive and clearly contrasting characteristics)
 - involve the study of both literature and visual/material culture
 - compare the ways in which one of the following themes is approached through the cultural sources studied:
 - myth/religion
 - gender
 - slavery
 - rule and authority
 - community and citizenship

Source material and scope of study²

Literature

7. Specifications will clearly state what literature is to be studied for all relevant components. Specifications must require that, where literature is the focus of study, the

¹ “societies” here are defined by their distinctness in terms of their culture, structures and beliefs. In this context, for example, Athens and Sparta in the 5th Century would be distinct and contrasting societies, as would early Republican Rome and later Imperial Rome.

² This section outlines the amount of material it is expected that a specification will cover for literature and visual/material culture. Specifications may combine material from within and across both areas in one component, as long as the equivalence of material is clearly preserved.

amount of material to be studied per 20% of the qualification must be equivalent, as specified in Appendix A, to at least³:

- 2000 lines of epic, or
- 500 lines of extended verse, or
- 1 full play, or
- 350 lines of shorter verse, or
- ½ book⁴ of non-fiction prose, or
- ½ novel or equivalent fable material, or
- 1 speech or 5 letters

Visual/material culture⁵

8. Specifications will clearly identify what visual/material culture is to be studied for all relevant components. Specifications must require students to study:

- architecture, or
- artefacts and artworks, or
- a combination of both

9. Where “types” are referred to below this is defined as a subset of either architecture or artefacts and artworks that:

- is recognisable and has distinct characteristics
- has a specific, common purpose
- has sufficient extant and known examples to enable coherent and meaningful study

10. Specifications must require that, where architecture is the focus of study, the amount of material to be studied per 20% of the specification must be equivalent to, at least:

- four examples⁶ of one type⁷ of building or defined space, or
- two examples of two types of building or defined space

³ Appendix A gives a list of ancient authors, divided by types of work. The list at Appendix A is not exhaustive and awarding organisations may include further authors in specifications. Where this is the case awarding organisations must include a rationale for these to demonstrate that they are comparable to those listed and that they are clearly relevant to the subject.

⁴ Ancient works are split into “books” which, in turn, are divided into “chapters”; this is a standard and unambiguous term within classical scholarship.

⁵ Defined as the study of the physical remains of the ancient world.

⁶ An “example” is an individual piece belonging to that particular type; for instance, the Parthenon at Athens, the Palace at Mycenae, the amphitheatre at Pompeii, the Pnyx at Athens.

⁷ Types of architecture may include fora, temples, palaces, theatres and amphitheatres, residential buildings, baths, stadia, villas or other types of buildings or defined spaces.

11. Specifications must require that, where artefacts and artworks are the focus of study, the amount of material to be studied per 20% of the qualification must be equivalent to, at least:

- eight examples⁸ of one type⁹ of artefact or artwork, or
- four examples of two types of artefact or artwork

12. Specifications must require that the amount of material each student studies increases in proportion to the weighting of the topic in the qualification. Specifications must require that:

- if more than 40% of the qualification is focused on literature, students must study at least two of the nine types/genres of work listed in Appendix A
- if more than 40% of the qualification is visual/material culture, students must study both architecture, and artefacts and artworks

Knowledge, understanding and skills

13. GCSE specifications in classical civilisation must require students to:

- know and understand the surviving literary and material remains of the classical world in their social, historical and cultural contexts, including the thought and ideas contemporary to their creation
- understand, interpret and analyse a range of evidence from classical sources, and evaluate and use this evidence to form evidence-based judgements and responses to the material studied
- present these judgements and information in a clear, concise and logical manner

14. Specifications must require students, in relation to the literature studied, to:

- know and understand aspects of plot, characterisation, events and settings, including:
 - motivation
 - sequence of events
 - the relationships between actions or events
- know and understand themes in classical texts and distinguish between them, including:

⁸ An “example” is an individual piece belonging to that particular type; for instance, the vase depicting Achilles and Penthesileia by Exekias (in the British Museum), the statue of Laocoon and his Sons excavated in Rome (Vatican Museums), the Alexander Mosaic from the House of the Faun in Pompeii, the Prima Porta portrait statue of Augustus.

⁹ Types of artefacts and artworks may include pottery, sculpture, mosaics, wall-paintings or other specific types of artefacts and artworks.

- specific evidence for the use of a theme
 - why an author may have chosen to use a specific theme
 - how the themes of the texts relate to their particular political and cultural contexts (as appropriate)
- know and understand issues of form, purpose and genre of classical texts, including:
 - the characteristics of the literary genres of their set texts, and whether the texts are typical or atypical of the genre
 - the ways in which the conventions of literary genre, and the form and arrangement of the set texts shape their meaning
 - the influence of the purpose of a text on its creation
 - apply their knowledge of the cultural contexts in which the texts were produced, to inform evidence-based judgements about the classical texts, including:
 - the ways the texts were performed or read (if applicable to the text studied)
 - how they were understood by their ancient audience
 - the contexts in which their set texts were produced and, as far as possible, the author's intention in producing them
 - use classical texts to demonstrate an understanding of the social, historical and cultural context of the classical world, including:
 - how their set texts depict and reflect ancient culture
 - details about the classical world which can be ascertained from the study of the text
 - know and understand the possible different responses to the texts studied from different audiences, both from the classical period and later times, up until the modern day

15. Specifications must require students, in relation to the visual/material culture studied, to:

- know and understand the type(s) and examples of visual/material remains studied, including:
 - their appearance, style, content and original location
- know and understand the original use or purpose of the visual/material remains studied and the impact this had on its creation and/or form, including (as appropriate):
 - its original location/site

- reasons why the key works were built/produced
- recognise and explain decorative techniques and styles relating to the materials studied
- know and understand the key issues with working with different types of source material, including:
 - issues raised by the nature of the type of material or the specific examples studied
 - fragmentary, damaged or relocated material (as applicable)
 - the limitations of what can be deduced from the extant evidence
- apply their knowledge of the cultural contexts, in which the materials were produced, to inform evidence-based judgements regarding the material remains, including (as appropriate):
 - how and why a key work was commissioned and the significance of where it was sited/displayed
- use the source materials to develop an understanding of the social, historical and cultural context of the classical world, including:
 - how their set material depicts and reflects ancient culture
 - details about the classical world which can be ascertained from the study of the material
- know and understand the different interpretations of the visual/material remains studied, for instance by different audiences, from the classical period and later times, up until the modern day

16. In addition to the above, in relation to the comparative thematic study, specifications must require that students:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the theme studied, including:
 - classical ideas related to the theme and their impact
 - cultural figures and events relevant to the theme and why they were important
- make informed comparisons between elements of the classical world in relation to the theme, including showing knowledge and understanding of:
 - the significant characteristics of the different societies studied
 - the impact of the different intellectual and cultural contexts of the societies studied on the classical ideas related to the theme studied

- use relevant literature and visual/material culture in conjunction with one another in order to inform their judgements regarding the theme studied, including knowledge and understanding of:
 - how aspects of the knowledge and understanding of the theme and societies can be ascertained from the source material
 - how different sources reference the theme studied, and why or how differences in presentation may occur in the source material studied

Appendix A

The following literary genres, authors and corresponding amounts of material are for use in designing the sections of a classical civilisation specification focused on the topic area of “literature”. Where awarding organisations wish to include material which is not on this list they must include a rationale for these to demonstrate that they are comparable to those listed and that they are clearly relevant to the subject.

The nine types of work which can be studied are:

Epic poetry	narrative hexameter poems of substantial length on a mythological or historical theme
Drama	the scripts of tragic and comic ancient performances
Extended verse	single poems or works of substantial length, although shorter than epic (minimum 300 lines), on a single theme
Shorter verse	poetry which is shorter than that found in extended poetry, may be composed on a variety of diverse themes; including elegiac poetry, lyric poetry, epigram and satire
Non-fiction prose	works of narrative or descriptive prose covering historical and geographical topics
Novel	works of fictional narrative prose
Fable	brief prose stories featuring anthropomorphised animals, objects and natural forces, and mythological characters, which carry a moral message
Oratory	rhetorical prose works, which may have been (but not necessarily) delivered as real-life speeches
Letters	prose works in epistolary style, which may have been (but not necessarily) composed as real-life communications

Some authors/collections wrote/contain works of more than one genre/type. Where this is the case their name may appear more than once, in more than one column.

Literature written in Greek: material studied per 20% of qualification must be at least the equivalent of:

Epic 2000 lines	Extended verse 500 lines	Drama 1 play	Shorter verse 350 lines	Non-fiction prose ½ book¹⁰	Novel & fable ½ novel¹¹	Oratory 1 speech
Homer	Hesiod	Aeschylus	Sappho	Herodotus	Achilles Tatius	Lysias
Apollonius of Rhodes	Homeric Hymns	Sophocles	Pindar	Thucydides	Longus	Demosthenes
		Euripides	Callimachus	Xenophon	Lucian	Isocrates
		Aristophanes	Theocritus	Arrian	Aesop	Aeschines
		Menander	Herodas	Polybius		Hyperides
			Alcaeus	Dionysius of Halicarnassus		
			Ibycus	Appian		
			Simonides	Josephus		
			Bacchylides	Procopius		
			Homeric Hymns	Plutarch ¹²		
				Cassius Dio		
				Strabo		
				Pausanias		

¹⁰ Ancient works are split into “books” which, in turn, are divided into “chapters”, this is a standard and unambiguous term within classical scholarship

¹¹ OR the equivalent in fable material where 30 fables are equivalent to half a novel

¹² For “Plutarch” one “book” is taken as being equivalent to one “Life”

Literature written in Latin: material studied per 20% of qualification must be at least the equivalent of:

Epic 2000 lines	Extended verse 500 lines	Drama 1 play	Shorter verse 350 lines	Non-fiction prose ½ book¹³	Novel and fable ½ novel¹⁴	Oratory and letters 1 speech/5 letters
Virgil	Lucretius	Plautus	Horace	Sallust	Petronius	Oratory
Lucan	Virgil	Terence	Catullus	Caesar	Apuleius	Cicero
Statius	Ovid	Seneca the Younger	Ovid	Livy	Phaedrus	Pliny the Younger
Ovid			Propertius	Valerius Maximus	Seneca the Younger	Panegyrici Latini
Silius Italicus			Tibullus	Velleius Paterculus		Letters
Ennius			Gallus	Tacitus		Cicero
			Sulpicia	Suetonius ¹⁵		Pliny the Younger
			Martial	Ammianus Marcellinus		Fronto
			Juvenal	Historia Augusta		Seneca the Younger
			Persius			
			Virgil			

¹³ Ancient works are split into “books” which, in turn, are divided into “chapters”, this is a standard and unambiguous term within classical scholarship

¹⁴ OR the equivalent in fable material where 30 fables are equivalent to half a novel

¹⁵ For “Suetonius” one “book” is taken as being equivalent to one “Life”



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