2025 NCEA Assessment Report

Subject:	Classical Studies
Level:	3
Achievement standard(s):	91394, 91395, 91396

General commentary

Candidates should take care when selecting a question and use the planning page to ensure all parts are addressed. The chosen question must be clearly identified using the correct question number. Only one question should be answered, and only the key terms from that question should be used throughout the response.

Where a question includes an "and / or option", candidates must clearly state which aspect(s) they are addressing and maintain this focus consistently throughout the response.

Responses written in extended paragraph form generally demonstrated stronger analysis than those made up of short, underdeveloped paragraphs. Candidates should prioritise quality over quantity – a well-developed, clear, and relevant discussion of one example is more effective than multiple examples treated superficially.

Some candidates responded to a question they had prepared in advance rather than one of the questions set in the examination. These responses did not meet the standard. Similarly, using inappropriate texts, art works, or historical figures made it difficult to meet the assessment criteria. Plot summaries, art work descriptions, or biographical accounts alone are insufficient; candidates must engage analytically with the question and demonstrate original thinking.

Candidates are required to use primary source evidence, such as direct quotations, accurate paraphrasing, or specific references to details within art works. This evidence must be relevant to the chosen question and be used to support the candidate's argument. Just as it is important to select an appropriate text, art work, or historical figure, it is equally important to select appropriate and purposeful evidence.

Report on individual achievement standard(s)

Achievement standard 91394: Analyse ideas and values of the classical world

Assessment

The examination included four questions from which candidates were required to select one to respond to. The questions covered the themes specified in the 2025 assessment specifications: leadership, identity, power, and ideology.

The questions required candidates to apply their understanding of the ideas and values of the classical world as communicated through a classical literary text.

Candidates were required to develop a response that analysed and drew conclusions in relation to the focus of the question.

Commentary

Across all texts, candidates who carefully unpacked their chosen question and made explicit decisions about how they were responding were more successful. Where questions included 'and / or' options, stronger responses clearly stated which aspect(s) they were addressing and sustained this focus throughout. Candidates who established a clear argument / position in their introduction and returned to it in topic sentences and conclusions consistently achieved higher results.

Responses on Virgil's *Aeneid* often focused on Books 1, 2, and 4. Stronger answers drew on the later books, showing fuller development of character, identity, and themes across the epic.

Responses on Horace's *Ode 1.37* showed strong awareness of historical and political context, but the brevity of the text limited literary evidence, leading some answers to focus more on context than close textual analysis. Responses on Aristophanes were generally confident, though attempts to address two texts often lacked depth, whereas stronger answers focused on a single work and explored it in detail.

Responses on Sophocles most often addressed Questions One and Four, while those on Homer (*Iliad* or *Odyssey*) typically focused on Questions Two and Three.

Overall response quality and length continue to improve, partly due to the digital format. However, longer responses were not necessarily more successful; very lengthy answers (often over 2,000 words) sometimes became unfocused. An increasing number of candidates quoted secondary scholarship, demonstrating engagement beyond the text, but such quotations were often descriptive rather than analytical. Stronger responses drew on the primary text to develop confident and original analysis.

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- responded to the question but did not fully engage with all aspects of it
- used two or three examples, often drawn from well-known sections of the text
- demonstrated a general understanding of events and ideas, though some inaccuracies were present
- identified ideas or values, sometimes without using precise Greek or Latin terminology
- used quotation or paraphrasing inconsistently
- relied heavily on narrative summary rather than analysis
- lacked a sustained argument or clear structure.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Merit** commonly:

- responded to all aspects of the question and maintained focus throughout
- presented an argument, though this was sometimes narrow or underdeveloped
- used a range of examples (often three or more) supported by quotation
- demonstrated accurate understanding of ideas and values within the text
- used appropriate Greek and Latin terminology correctly
- provided clear analysis and made meaningful links between evidence and ideas
- began to integrate socio-historical context and authorial purpose
- structured their responses effectively.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Excellence** commonly:

- responded purposefully and perceptively to the question
- established a clear and sustained thesis, referred to throughout the response

- used a broad range of well-chosen examples, including less familiar parts of the text
- integrated quotation and paraphrase fluently into their analysis
- demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between text and context
- showed clear insight into authorial purpose and literary technique
- developed thoughtful and evaluative conclusions
- structured their writing effectively and communicated ideas fluently.

Candidates who were awarded **Not Achieved** commonly:

- did not address the question or misunderstood its demands
- relied almost entirely on plot summary
- provided little or no textual evidence
- used one or no specific examples
- wrote a very brief or underdeveloped response
- misunderstood key events, ideas, or values
- failed to analyse textual material.

Achievement standard 91395: Analyse the significance of a work(s) of art in the classical world

Assessment

The examination included four questions from which candidates were required to select one to respond to. The questions covered Explanatory Notes 3 and 4 of the standard as specified in the 2025 assessment specifications.

The questions required candidates to apply their understanding of the significance of a work(s) of art in the classical world.

Candidates were required to develop a response that analysed and drew conclusions in relation to the focus of the question.

Commentary

Candidates who responded using more than one art work often struggled to reach the depth and detail required for higher-level achievement. Many did not identify their chosen question in the space provided, making it difficult to determine the focus of their response.

Understanding and using art-specific terminology remains essential; many candidates did not clearly demonstrate this (e.g., Question One – idealism). Candidates who balanced analysis of the art work with its historical and cultural context achieved the strongest results, providing specific evidence from the work itself rather than only situational context.

Some candidates misunderstood Question Three, addressing only the narrative of their chosen art work rather than the significance of narrative as a feature.

An increase in the use of quotes was noted, but these must be relevant and contextualised; quotes alone do not guarantee higher marks.

Roman art and Greek vase painting remain the most popular topics, particularly the Colosseum, Ara Pacis Augustae, Augustus of Prima Porta, Kleophrades Hydria, and the Exekias Amphora and Kylix.

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- answered an aspect of what the question was asking
- utilised more than one art work, lacking the depth required for higher levels of achievement
- used some appropriate terminology
- described specific features of the art work
- made some reference to the context of the art work but struggled to balance context with artistic features
- showed some appreciation of the question but may not have understood nuance
- included some quotes, although not always relevant
- showed a good understanding of their chosen art work and were able to describe aspects of it but often did not answer both parts of the question.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Merit** commonly:

- understood multiple features of the art work
- showed an appreciation of context, but did not link effectively to the question
- described a range of relevant features of the art work(s) and included specific evidence in their answer
- answered in depth but was unbalanced in approach, were able to give very good specifics about the art work itself
- showed knowledge of the context in which the art work(s) were created
- gave in-depth analysis and discussion of the features of art work(s).

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Excellence** commonly:

- made strong links between context and features of the art work
- utilised strong supporting evidence – specific features of the art work
- followed a logical format and had good paragraph structure
- addressed the 'extent' part of the question with relevant evidence and quotes
- utilised quotations from ancient authors and classicists judiciously
- used relevant terminology effectively to enhance discussion
- demonstrated perceptive analysis by linking features of the art work(s) and the context in which they were created
- showed insight in their discussion and sophistication of ideas
- chose the correct art work for the question and addressed both aspects of the question
- made appropriate comparisons to other works or contexts.

Candidates who were awarded **Not Achieved** commonly:

- misunderstood the intent of the question, e.g. for Question One, many candidates described features of the art work but did not link to the style
- showed an appreciation of context, but did not describe the features of the art work
- gave a response that was very limited and often lacked structure
- failed to answer the question or chose the wrong question to answer for their chosen art work(s)
- did not know the art work in any detail or provided superficial information
- only gave one aspect of the art work, e.g., for the Colosseum only wrote about the seating, or about the battles themselves and nothing else

- gave too much context on the art work and not the question, e.g., explaining about the gladiators in the Colosseum and nothing about the structure (often for Question Two)
- provided a rote learnt response and tried to make it work for their question, often repeated art works that they had possibly used in their internal assessment
- wrote on more than one art work and provided very general information on each
- used an art work that wasn't in context. e.g., Michelangelo's *David*.

Achievement standard 91396: Analyse the impact of a significant historical figure on the classical world

Assessment

The examination included four questions from which candidates were required to select one to respond to. The questions covered the themes specified in the 2025 assessment specifications: status, conflict, leadership, and change.

The questions required candidates to apply their understanding of the impact of a significant historical figure on the classical world.

Candidates were required to develop a response that analysed and drew conclusions in relation to the focus of the question.

Commentary

Candidates should focus directly on the question and use key terms consistently, avoiding superfluous phrases (e.g., "Alexander was undoubtedly a significant historical figure who has been studied for decades"). While many demonstrated sound knowledge of their chosen figure and context, a common issue was failing to address all parts of the question. For example, Question Three required candidates to "Discuss whether a change(s) introduced by a significant classical figure was for the better or for the worse." Many responses described changes without evaluating their positive or negative impact, limiting analytical depth.

Stronger responses developed three or four main areas thoughtfully rather than attempting to recount the figure's entire life. Effective use of primary sources, through quotations or paraphrasing with attribution, was common, though discussions of source reliability were often brief and superficial. Careful planning and engagement with the specific demands of the question are essential.

Art and architecture should only be used to support broader points (e.g., the breastplate of the Prima Porta Augustus to demonstrate propaganda about military leadership) rather than as standalone evidence. Specific details should be described rather than merely named (e.g., the Ara Pacis as evidence of Rome's fertility and prosperity). Modern concepts, such as human rights or inclusivity, should not be applied to historical figures, nor should comparisons to modern individuals be made.

Alexander the Great remains the most popular figure, followed by Octavian / Augustus, with fewer candidates choosing Socrates, Julius Caesar, or Cleopatra.

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- addressed some aspects of the question, resulting in a simplistic or unbalanced response
- focused on describing events or actions rather than analysing their significance
- provided minimal socio-political context or relevant examples to support their discussion
- used primary source evidence in a basic way (short quotes, paraphrasing, or implied references such as dates, names, or places) without integrating it into their argument

- developed responses focused more on narrative than analysis or evaluation.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Merit** commonly:

- addressed the question clearly in their introduction and generally used key words throughout; though some ideas lacked balance or depth
- endeavoured to cover all parts of the question
- thoughtfully developed their ideas in some depth and detail
- explored a range of ideas and showed connections between them
- used a range of well-chosen, relevant primary source evidence quotes to illustrate their examples
- provided specific and relevant examples that supported their discussion
- explored the wider socio-political or cultural context and linked it to their argument
- drew logical conclusions that demonstrated understanding of the figure's impact
- structured their ideas clearly and showed awareness of classical concepts.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Excellence** commonly:

- set up their argument well in their introduction, e.g., establishing what 'status' means for the figure, and then following through on their argument
- addressed all aspects of the question with a comprehensive and perceptive analysis
- pulled their points together for a thoughtful, developed conclusion, or had a common focus / thread that was revisited throughout their response
- engaged thoughtfully with both primary and secondary source evidence
- demonstrated a clear awareness and discussion of the figure's significance, e.g., in Question One, strong responses moved beyond merely explaining the strategy and instead evaluated how the strategy enhanced the individual's leadership, demonstrated their intelligence, or contributed to their significance and success within the historical context
- acknowledged limitations of sources swiftly and organically within their discussion, e.g., "while this is undoubtedly an unbiased source", and not allowing this to dominate their paragraphs
- appreciated the complexity of the perspectives in context, e.g., thoughtful discussion of how the Policy of Fusion was viewed by both Macedonians and Persians, or acknowledging how some of Augustus's changes were beneficial for both himself and SPQR
- drew strong, well-supported conclusions that maintained focus on the key ideas of the question
- integrated socio-political context seamlessly and showed nuanced understanding of the figure's impact
- structured their response logically and communicated ideas fluently.

Candidates who were awarded **Not Achieved** commonly:

- did a 'highlights' reel, effectively listing achievements of the figure, rather than picking a few to develop
- tried to apply modern day concepts to the classical world that simply aren't appropriate, e.g., Augustus's morality laws stripped people of their human rights, Alexander's Policy of Fusion being a form of an inclusive / humanitarian effort
- made links to modern day examples, such as President Donald Trump
- did not address the question fully or omitted key aspects of the discussion
- provided responses that were vague, overly brief, or did not meet the level of detail expected at Level 3
- relied heavily on narrative or irrelevant details rather than focusing on significance
- failed to include primary source evidence, or used it incorrectly

- submitted pre-prepared essays or rewrote work from internal assessments that was not relevant to the question
- showed little understanding of the socio-political context or the impact of the chosen figure.