



Department
for Education

Ancient languages

GCSE subject content

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The content for ancient languages GCSEs

Introduction

1. The GCSE subject content sets out the knowledge, understanding and skills common to all GCSE specifications in a given subject. Together with the assessment objectives it provides the framework within which awarding organisations create the detail of their specifications, so ensuring possibilities for progression to A level.

Aims and objectives

2. GCSE specifications in ancient languages should provide a strong foundation in linguistic and cultural competence, enabling students to break the boundaries of time and space and access knowledge and understanding of the ancient world directly through reading and responding to its language and literature. They should prepare students to make informed decisions about further educational opportunities in school and higher education and career choices.

3. GCSE specifications in an ancient language should enable students to:

- develop and deploy their knowledge of vocabulary, morphology and syntax in order to read, understand and interpret the ancient language
- develop their knowledge and understanding of ancient literature, values and society through the study of original texts, adapted and abridged, as appropriate
- select, analyse and evaluate evidence to draw informed conclusions from the literature studied to:
 - demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the historical, literary and cultural context of a text and
 - identify and appreciate its literary form and impact on the reader
 - develop and apply their critical, analytical and reflective skills to evaluate evidence from a range of sources

4. A GCSE in an ancient language should also encourage students to:

- develop insights into the relevance of an ancient language and of ancient literature and civilisation to our understanding of our modern world of diverse cultures¹
- deploy their knowledge and understanding of the ancient language to deepen their understanding of English and other languages
- relate their knowledge and understanding of the ancient world to other disciplines

¹ This does not apply to Biblical Hebrew.

- develop research and analytical skills which will empower them to become independent students and enquirers, equipping them for further study in arts, humanities and sciences

Subject content

5. This content sets out the full range of content for GCSE specifications in ancient languages. Awarding organisations may, however, use any flexibility to increase depth, breadth or context within the specified topics or to consolidate teaching of the subject content.
6. The content of the GCSE specifications in ancient languages must fully reflect the aims and objectives.
7. In Biblical Hebrew²:
 - specifications must not require the study of content beyond books from which set texts are taken
 - references in this document to the cultural, historical and literary contexts, and the ancient world or civilization, are as described within the books from which each set text is taken (not beyond)
 - references to ideas, social practices and values are also as described in the books from which each set text is taken. Comparing and contrasting the ancient and modern worlds is not required.

Scope of study

Knowledge and understanding of the language

8. GCSE specifications in ancient languages should require students to:
 - translate accurately into English an unseen passage of the ancient language either confectioned, or adapted from an original source
 - demonstrate their understanding of a narrative passage or passages of unseen confectioned or adapted ancient language by answering a variety of comprehension questions in English

EITHER:

² These restrictions apply to: the aims and objectives in paragraphs 2, 3, and 4; and to the knowledge and understanding set out in paragraph 9 (second, fifth and sixth bullet points).

- recognise, analyse and explain syntax and accidence³ as prescribed in the specification within the context of a narrative passage or passages⁴ of unseen confected or adapted ancient language

OR

- translate short sentences from English into the ancient language

Knowledge and understanding of literature, society and values through analysis, evaluation and response

9. GCSE specifications in ancient languages should require students to:

- read a range of ancient literature, including at least one selection of prose and/or verse⁵ texts in the original language, adapted and abridged, as appropriate, along with either a further selection of prose and/or verse texts in the original language or at least two different types of ancient sources (these ancient sources can be in translation and can include non-literary sources)⁶
- read original and adapted literature and answer questions in English on aspects of content, culture, social practices and values, translating and explaining key words and phrases
- understand and evaluate verse and/or prose literature, deploying knowledge of the ancient language to focus on explaining their literary style and impact on the reader
- identify, explain and respond to the use of common literary effects appropriate to the text
- demonstrate understanding of the cultural, historical and literary context in which the literature was composed, appropriate to the text
- select, analyse and evaluate evidence from ancient literature and/or other ancient sources, drawing informed conclusions to make a reasoned evidence-based response to the material studied, including, for ancient sources, comparing and contrasting ideas, values and social practices from the ancient and modern worlds⁷

³ For Biblical Hebrew, accidence should be taken to mean morphology.

⁴ These passages can be the same narrative passage or passages as used for comprehension or can be designed for the purpose.

⁵ For Biblical Hebrew: throughout this document, verse should be taken to mean poetry, not a unit of text.

⁶ Students of Biblical Hebrew must study a further selection of prose and/or verse texts in the original language (not different types of ancient sources).

⁷ For Biblical Hebrew, comparing and contrasting the ancient and modern worlds is not required. The requirement to select, analyse and evaluate evidence from ancient literature, drawing informed conclusions to make a reasoned evidence-based response to material studied including contrasting ideas, values and social practices still applies.

Appendix: Accidence, syntax and vocabulary

Awarding organisations must ensure that their specifications include details of the accidence, syntax and vocabulary for developing knowledge and understanding of the language in appendices for each of the ancient languages to ensure smooth transition to advanced level study.

These must include, as a minimum⁸:

Vocabulary

- a defined vocabulary list of at least 400 words and in addition, regular compounds of these words

Accidence

In ancient Greek and Latin:

- declension of all regular nouns and adjectives, and of some common pronouns
- conjugation of regular and deponent verbs in all moods, tenses and voices, with appropriate exceptions⁹
- formation of regular adverbs
- comparison of adjectives and adverbs

In Biblical Hebrew:

- formation of all nouns, adjectives, and pronouns
- conjugation of verbs in all aspects (tenses), voices, moods, persons, numbers, and genders, with appropriate exceptions
- formation of nouns, verbs and prepositions with suffixed pronouns
- formation of words with prefixed morphemes (prepositions, definite article, etc.)

Syntax

- standard uses of all cases, including time expression and the use of particular cases after certain verbs and prepositions in the defined vocabulary list
- sufficient common syntactical constructions, for example:

In ancient Greek and Latin:

⁸ Awarding organisations must use this as the basis for minimum requirements to be defined in specifications.

⁹ Examples of exceptions might be the gerund, the future perfect and the perfect subjunctive in Latin, and mi verbs and omicron contraction verbs in ancient Greek.

- direct and indirect statement
- direct and indirect question
- direct and indirect command
- relative clauses
- common uses of participles
- common types of conditional sentence
- common temporal, concessive and causal clauses
- purpose clauses
- result clauses

In Biblical Hebrew:

- relative clauses
- common types of conditional sentence
- common temporal, concessive and causal clauses
- purpose clauses
- result clauses
- verbless clauses
- asseverative clauses
- common negative clauses (including legal prohibitions)
- common oath clauses
- common interrogative clauses



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