

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/01–03

Paper 1

General comments

It is encouraging that the proportion of the very best quality responses has increased this session. The highest scoring candidates adhered faithfully to the demands of the question. Their essays were well structured and revealed evidence of logical and systematic thought. Introductions were cogent and often lively, while conclusions were succinct and reflected the thrust in the body of the essay. Coverage of the topic was well focused, comprehensive and often interesting. Illustrative local, regional and international examples were often used well to underline key points. The very best efforts revealed not only excellent knowledge of the topic but also considerable maturity, sensitivity and sophistication.

Mid-range answers were competent with no undue digression. Approaches and attitudes were sensible and major points were illustrated and satisfactorily developed. Occasionally counter-arguments could be dismissed too glibly or easily so that opportunities for a more extensive discussion were missed. Towards the lower end of this category, there was sometimes a tendency to assert and generalise.

Less satisfactory responses were insufficiently focused on the question, leading to unnecessary digression. Relevance was sometimes implicit or tangential, and ideas could be vague and insufficiently developed. The range of points was often limited and essays lacked real depth of analysis because of brevity. Quotations were at times very inaccurate, or inappropriate, and sometimes ascribed to dubious sources. The weakest answers offered little or even no substance. Some contained barely a hundred words. A substantial number of extremely weak scripts are still being encountered. In some of these cases, low standards in written English impede the mark for content as meaning becomes very difficult to deduce. In other instances, candidates entirely misinterpret the question, or do not succeed in ill-judged attempts to redirect the question to suit prepared material.

It is pleasing to report that rubric infringements with regard to coverage of the sections are now very rare.

Use of time

Most candidates coped comfortably with writing two essays within the permitted time. However, it was noticeable that those who wrote copiously were sometimes more prone to errors in English as they were not able to sustain levels of accuracy. The time spent writing at unnecessary length could be better utilised to complete a thorough and systematic check of the completed work so as to eliminate careless and avoidable mistakes. Even more able candidates can waste marks sometimes by being careless about such basics as subject-verb agreement. At the other end of the spectrum, there were examples of good quality essays which were on the short side and would have benefited from more detailed analysis and illustrative examples.

Use of English

The standard of English ranged from full operational fluency to very weak knowledge of the language which made it very difficult at times to understand the content. However, the content of the vast majority of essays could be followed without major problems. The tone of most essays was appropriate to the subject matter although occasional comments such as 'But hey, who cares?' and 'politicians are mostly ****' did nothing to improve the overall quality of an essay.

Common errors seen in the essays this session included

- frequent incorrect joining up of words: e.g. infact, inturn, donot, alot, inorder, aswell, eventhough
- frequent incorrect separation of words: e.g. now a days, no where, news papers, with out, more over
- numerous mismatches in subject/verb agreements: e.g. many people has experienced...
- much confusion between to/too, here/hear, there/their

- incorrect use of apostrophes: e.g. Its not her fault ; The storm lost it's intensity,"
- incorrect placing of the apostrophe when denoting possession
- misspelling of 'opportunity' (usually as oppurtunity or opportunity)
- incorrect comparative forms such as more easier/more richer
- confusion between affect/effect, amount/number, economic/economical and lose/loose
- unnecessary overuse of etc.
- incorrect use of phrasal verbs and prepositions
- abbreviations inappropriate to a formal essay style: e.g. b/w for between, w/o for without and take into a/c for account
- problems with the appropriate use of definite and indefinite articles
- omission of 'd' on the past participle e.g. this was cause by...
- incorrect pluralisation: e.g. we received much helps; there was much gossips about this incident
- misuse/omission of commas leading to loss of meaning and disruption of flow

Examiners believe that it is not through lack of language knowledge *per se* but rather through carelessness that many such rudimentary errors occur in answers. It is therefore all the more important to train candidates to leave sufficient time at the end of the examination to run a thorough and systematic check of each sentence to spot and correct obvious errors. It is pleasing to notice by the corrections on scripts that a number of Centres have already introduced this process with the positive result that their candidates are not losing marks unnecessarily.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

This question did not attract many answers. Candidates usually based their responses on what they had observed and seen reported in their own countries. Some were able to use apt examples to show how conscientious politicians can implement education, health, taxation and social policies to improve people's lives. Others painted a picture of greed and corruption demonstrating how politicians were amassing riches at the expense of the populace.

Question 2

Most candidates stressed the necessity for good health, family involvement and an adequate pension to be able to enjoy a reasonably good quality of life. Others took a more pessimistic view and presented visions of an overpopulated planet with ever increasing battles for resources and large numbers of pensioners suffering a lonely, miserable existence in depressing waiting rooms for death, euphemistically called retirement homes. Many better answers pointed to the future likelihood of the younger generations resenting having to work harder to support the aged and acknowledged the danger of an impending generation conflict.

Question 3

This was a popular question but it was not always well handled. Some answers focused entirely on formal, especially university education, as the assured path to well paid executive jobs. The uneducated were considered to be of 'no use whatsoever' in the employment market. More rounded answers recognised that menial and manual jobs, the province of the 'uneducated,' have an essential role to play in such areas as farming, labouring and cleanliness of the environment. These functions provide essential support for society without which the CEOs and the professions would be unable to operate efficiently. The best answers often also pointed out that skilled tradesmen in richer countries are able to generate unexpectedly high incomes because of the high demand for their skills.

Question 4

This was a reasonably popular question which offered students of sociology a good opportunity to show their content knowledge. Murdock was perhaps the most cited source and his concept of the traditional/nuclear family was described in great detail and then often contrasted with the views of other luminaries. Some candidates did not indicate their own personal interpretation or state whose views they felt to be more accurate. This approach often took up too much essay time which would have been better spent in considering issues such as divorce, alternative family units and other tensions and circumstances which have the potential to replace the traditional family in the future.

Question 5

This was a very popular question which attracted many varied responses and a reasonable proportion of acceptable answers. Success was generally and reasonably viewed as being the realisation of set goals. Some candidates struggled, when juggling permutations of luck, ability and talent, to establish a ranking order for success. They tended to generalise and use few examples. Better answers included elements of hard work and determination in the 'mix' and were able to illustrate their points from the lives of people such as Einstein, Fleming and Gandhi.

Section 2

Question 6

Very few candidates tackled this question. Weaker answers tended to be descriptive of various concerns throughout the world with little idea of how agreements could be effective. More able candidates were able to demonstrate concrete examples of recent international concerns which have been at least partially resolved. They were also able to provide convincing examples (e.g. Kyoto) of how national interests can still override major global concerns.

Question 7

Few candidates attempted this question, but it prompted a fair number of interesting answers. Weaker answers simply picked out perceived symbols of Westernisation such as miniskirts and McDonalds. Better answers ranged far more widely to assess how far traditions, customs, language, culture, leisure pursuits, food and social attitudes may have been diluted, modified or transformed by various influences resulting from increasing globalisation.

Question 8

This was a very popular question. Some candidates were able to tackle the issues in real depth and showed good content knowledge with appropriate evaluation of cyber crimes such as identity theft and hacking into restricted information and bank accounts. They showed how various forms of cyber crime have been almost instantly followed by counter measures to solve and ultimately prevent a reoccurrence. Weaker answers downplayed or even ignored the crime element in the question and went on, often at length, about the general topic of advances in technology. Some candidates spent too much time digressing on armed conflicts of various kinds and included information on guns, nuclear bombs and other weapons of mass destruction, but without linking this to the focus of the question

Question 9

This was another popular question. Many candidates demonstrated good subject knowledge and were quick to point out problems with the procedures and possibly negative future outcomes for individuals and society in general. They were often enthusiastic about what can now be done to 'correct' medical problems before birth but were also well aware of the relevant ethical, financial, social and religious implications. A number of weaker answers focused primarily on stunningly beautiful designer babies, provided with the 'intelligence' gene, as the start of a new superior form of human beings.

Question 10

This was a moderately popular question which attracted a variety of answers. A few candidates limited themselves to the view that natural disasters are a divine punishment for immorality. Most were able to divide disasters into those caused or enhanced by human beings and those where humans have no influence, but some weaker candidates were factually inaccurate about earthquakes and volcanoes. Others dealt at unwanted length with the causes of global warming and thus redirected their content towards examples of environmental damage with scant or no reference to the topic of disasters, which was what the question required.

Section 3

Question 11

This was not very popular, and many answers seemed rather uncertain of what line to take. Most confined themselves to media and celebrity culture but usually missed the point of the perceived necessity for aspiring celebrities to feature regularly in the media, irrespective of whether this is for good or bad reasons. A few candidates discussed the impact of good and also bad publicity in the world of commerce and industry.

Question 12

Few attempted this question. The most usual opinion expressed was that many types of art had stood the test of time and are extremely valuable, and that therefore they are superior to anything a computer can produce and would have no problems surviving this computer age. Very few explored the art forms which have emanated from newer technologies.

Question 13

This was a reasonably popular question but seldom well tackled. Few bothered to engage with the concept of 'entertain', although the ideas of relaxation, fun and 'stress busting' did figure in some answers. 'Controversy' was often understood to indicate explicit sex, violence or political and religious issues. Very few suggested that entertainment and controversy might co-exist in a film. Surprisingly many answers failed to name films and provide suitable illustrative examples.

Question 14

This question was rarely attempted and usually not well done. What might be understood by the concept of 'well-rounded' was very seldom discussed or even mentioned. Candidates tended to focus on the value of music in general with some examples of possible advantages gained by studying, listening and performing music. There was next to no attempt to align music with other pursuits in different/complementary areas or subjects.

Question 15

This question was very popular and attracted some interesting and pleasing responses. Much discussion centred around the word 'matters' in the question, with the consensus of opinion being that young people's magazines do deal with matters that really concern young people rather than their elders. This point was often well constructed and ably defended. Some scorned celebrity gossip and the world of cosmetics and fashion but did acknowledge the usefulness of articles relating to health, nutrition, exercise and more personal issues which might be embarrassing to discuss with parents. Selected magazines were named and contrasted to similar but inferior products, and candidates usually gave sound reasons for their preferences.