

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/01

Paper 1

General comments

The general comments for the previous November session focused mainly on examination technique. It is pleasing to note that some Centres have responded to the advice given with the result that their candidates' essays were better structured with informative introductions and succinct summaries. Where the guidance has not been heeded, introductions were often unnecessarily long and even tortuous and contributed little to the essay as a whole. For instance, in answering Question 7 some candidates felt it necessary to spend up to a whole page describing the Internet before embarking on the main body of the essay. Conclusions were sometimes very brief, simplistic summaries

There was evidence that a higher proportion of candidates than usual had checked and corrected their English where appropriate. This saved them losing marks for careless, avoidable errors. There is no reason why this should not be common practice for all candidates.

The best essays were always fully focused on the question with due notice taken of key words, and were not digressive with scant reference to the question as set. Key points were well developed and supported by relevant examples which made them credible and convincing. But there are still too many candidates who do not refer specifically to the terms of their chosen question and simply write all that they know about the topic. Such essays are often characterised by generalisation, assertion and sweeping statements which cannot attract high marks. These candidates need more practice in adapting their knowledge to the specific terms of the question.

A wide range of ability was seen this year. More able candidates presented mature and sophisticated responses of high quality. By contrast, weaker candidates struggled to express themselves adequately in English and this inability often impeded the content of their essays as it was very difficult at times to follow the discussion. They often had a good vocabulary at their disposal but unfortunately had limited knowledge of how to use these words in their relevant context. Although such candidates knew the infinitive form of irregular verbs, they sometimes had no idea of the correct form of the past tense and past participle. This demonstrates once again the dangers of trying to acquire new vocabulary on a simplistic word-for-word equivalent basis instead of using a short phrase or sentence to remember the context and the correct form.

A small minority of candidates numbered their paragraphs. It is recommended that this be discontinued. If candidates are using an answer booklet without a margin they should rule one on each side – this is helpful, not just for the Examiner, but also in case extra words/phrases need to be inserted by the candidate.

Rubric infringements were rare this session.

Use of time

A number of candidates having written a lengthy first essay were clearly in a rush to complete the second essay. Some essays were clearly unfinished. They ended in mid-sentence or the conclusions were very brief. Quite a few candidates resorted to counting every word on their scripts instead of concentrating on a thorough check to spot and correct careless mistakes.

Some candidates need to be reminded that it is not necessary to write as much as possible. They often handicap themselves in such cases by digressing and becoming too descriptive. There is also the danger that the quality of the English may deteriorate in overlong scripts.

Use of English

There was wide variation in candidates' ability to write English fluently. Some of the candidates have virtually full operational command of the language but the weakest candidates are unable to express themselves with any accuracy to the detriment of the content. However, in most cases, even if the English is not absolutely accurate or the idiom is sometimes not appropriate, there is no major problem comprehending what the candidate wishes to state.

A systematic eradication of the very common errors in the following list is the quickest route to higher marks for the use of English:

- non-agreement of subject and verb due to carelessness rather than lack of knowledge
- non-agreement of subject and possessive pronoun e.g. *the companies have its headquarters*
- missing endings on plural nouns,
- incorrect use following 'one' e.g. *one has his problems* instead of 'one's problems'
- omission of the definite article
- confusion between *their/there, to/too, here/hear*
- use of 'latters' - a word which does not exist
- incorrect use/omission of apostrophes e.g. *its not his job* and *the sun has lost it's power*
- incorrect comparative forms such as *more easier, more richer, more harder*
- carelessness with past participles of regular verbs e.g. *she has played and dance all day*
- omission or incorrect use of commas

All these points have been pointed out regularly in past reports. They are basic errors which, in most instances, are not caused by lack of knowledge but by carelessness. It makes the need for a systematic check at the end of the examination all the more important. It is frustrating for Examiners to have to award lower marks for Use of English when it is plain to see that some candidates, with due care and attention, might have achieved a higher mark

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Most answers to this looked at 'ordinary' people and paid tribute to their contribution to the nation as soldiers who repulsed the enemy or who acted as an irrepressible force, following inspirational leaders, to overthrow tyrannical rulers and corrupt systems. The French and Russian revolutions were often mentioned as examples. Better answers analysed the role and participation of the average citizen in such democratic processes as elections and referendums.

Question 2

This question was less popular than anticipated. Unfortunately, quite a number of candidates misinterpreted 'overrated' and consequently were not able to answer the question properly. Better answers for the proposition pointed to the enormous media coverage which was often at the expense of more serious concerns. They condemned the huge incomes from sport, sponsors and advertising and, especially in the case of soccer, they believed too many players to be poor role models. The problems of performance enhancing drugs and other forms of cheating were also discussed. Those who supported the proposition pointed to the advantages of exercise for health in general and stressed the usefulness and benefits of teamwork in sport and other walks of life. Staging such major world events as the Olympic Games was often seen as a reason for national pride as were the achievements of successful teams and athletes.

Question 3

Few candidates attempted this question. Even fewer engaged fully with the notion of 'how far?' Some discussed equality rather than 'equal opportunities' and cited the case of communism as evidence that equality could never be achieved. Better answers highlighted the significant lack of progress towards equality of opportunity in many developing countries for such reasons as caste, class and religious beliefs. It was also seen as a low priority issue in countries grappling with poverty, low economic growth rates and frequent natural disasters. Some candidates acknowledged recent legislation in developed, democratic countries aimed at offering equal opportunities for all, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, religion and class, particularly at work and in education. They were also aware of the difficulties in implementing such measures.

Question 4

This was quite a popular question which was eagerly seized upon by candidates of business studies and economics who were often able to use specialised knowledge to good advantage. These candidates discussed the importance of small businesses in rural areas where they met the needs of the sparse population and in urban areas where they tended to be niche businesses offering a more personal service than huge stores. Fulfilling local needs and providing a personal service was rightly seen as their key to their survival. Better answers were able to support this view by providing relevant local examples.

Question 5

This was a reasonably popular question. More able candidates were able to illustrate that there is more to school than academic subjects, e.g. experiencing socialisation, competitiveness and discipline. It was stressed by many candidates that learning, both by making mistakes and by learning from a wide range of experiences, develops a person's character and personality. The influence of parents and the home environment in early years was also identified as a significant determinant in the life-long learning process. Weaker candidates tended to compartmentalise the stages and types of learning, thus missing the overlap and the continuity. Few candidates ventured into the fields of leisure activities and hobbies.

Question 6

This was not popular and there were very few higher scoring answers. Most answers were generalised. Some accused the more developed countries of exploiting poorer countries by overcharging for their latest developments. Better answers pointed out that some poorer countries did already benefit by importing well used but still functional computers, mobile phones and calculators for next to nothing. Candidates often wrote about how tried and tested drugs and medicines, now much cheaper than when they first appeared on the market, had become affordable and available.

Question 7

This was the most popular topic on the paper, and candidates were obviously on familiar ground here. Most could list and contrast quite a number of advantages and disadvantages. They were very concerned about the use terrorists can make of the communication facilities offered by the Internet and worried about the potential corruption of the young. Parental controls were either not mentioned or dismissed as unreliable. Quick access to information was universally praised but better candidates did question the reliability and accuracy of some sites. Cyber-crime also figured prominently, but few mentioned secure sites. Many concluded that harm or help from the Internet is in the hands of the individual user. They also felt that policing of the Internet was insufficiently developed and that some form of governmental control should monitor sites and block the worst excesses.

Question 8

While this was not a popular option, Examiners reported some interesting and sophisticated answers to it. A few excellent responses were able to doubt and even pick holes in the main arguments of both camps. The majority of candidates analysed the battle between scientific evidence and religious faith which has been going on for centuries. Galileo and Darwin were frequently used as examples. A number of devoutly religious candidates argued that science proves faith. The current clashes between religious and scientific attitudes over cloning and stem cell research stirred much controversy.

Question 9

This had very few takers. Those who attempted it did appreciate the practical usefulness of mathematics in everyday life but often failed to see the relevance of maths to other disciplines such as engineering, physics and economics. Candidates who disliked mathematics lessons thought the teaching was boring and not relevant to their needs because they could see no real application for it.

Question 10

This was a moderately popular question. Most answers focused on internal safeguards, general precautions and border controls. The element of 'being prepared' was sometimes partially neglected. Examples of recent outbreaks of SARS and bird flu were given but the discussion tended to centre around counter measures rather than preparedness. The important role of International cooperation and World Health Organisation programmes was duly discussed and analysed in better answers.

Question 11

This was a popular topic but was seldom done very well. Weaker answers focused mainly on advertising informing consumers about new products. Little was said about keeping established products in the public eye. The element of 'entertaining' was often totally overlooked. This was a topic crying out for illustrative examples but poorer responses failed to provide them. Better answers dealt with commercial products but also gave examples of local and national awareness campaigns warning against such dangers as drug taking, Aids and driving under the influence of alcohol. They also discussed how some advertising can be entertaining thanks to humour, jingles or word play. They then provided examples to support their views.

Question 12

This had relatively few takers. Candidates were aware that the reporting of news items is generally purely factual but that the comments and analyses of these items can be very biased depending on personal and political persuasion. Better answers discussed how banner headlines were designed to sell papers rather than properly reflect the content of the main news stories. They also realised that dictatorial regimes would only allow the 'official' interpretation of the news whereas democratic countries relied on various forms of institutional and independent monitoring. They were also alive to the vagaries of celebrity gossip which they sometimes seemed to enjoy.

Question 13

This was a moderately popular question. Unfortunately, quite a number of candidates focused mainly, or even exclusively, on what we say rather than *how* we say it. Better answers did deal with such elements as accent, pronunciation, slang, dialect, regional variation, grammatical accuracy and range of vocabulary as indicators of intelligence, cultural background and education but were also aware of the limitations of initial judgements of people based on their speech.

Question 14

Surprisingly few candidates opted for this. Nevertheless, several excellent well-informed essays were seen where the link between certain writers and the culture of the region was clearly forged and illuminated by good exemplification. A handful of weaker candidates did not have sufficient knowledge of any writers and of the regional culture to make a worthwhile attempt at this question. They wrote very generalised essays and failed to mention the name of a single writer.

Question 15

This question was moderately popular. Better answers gave good reasons why old buildings should be kept for historical, cultural and educational purposes and named appropriate examples. Such answers also discussed the need for modern health and safety issues to be applied to older structures as well as modern, more efficient buildings. No reason could be found as to why the old and the new could not co-exist. Weaker answers were generalised and often failed to name a single modern building of particular note.