

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/01

Paper 1

General comments

The structure of essays has shown some improvement again this year. Introductions are usually no longer rambling and overlong but set the scene quite succinctly for the essay. In some cases however, conclusions are not well written. They tend to be simply a reiteration, usually list-like, of the main points already discussed in the essay.

There was some evidence that a reasonable proportion of candidates had checked and corrected their English where appropriate. This saved them losing marks for careless, avoidable errors. This thorough and systematic checking of the English should be second priority to the urgent, continued need to concentrate on the exact wording of the question before embarking on the writing of the essay. The attached notes on candidates' responses to the questions indicate the questions this year where too many candidates did not read the question closely enough and therefore ignored key words, depriving themselves of higher marks. Similarly, the appearance of an essay title on the examination paper on a topic or similar area of interest to something which may have been anticipated and rehearsed in lessons does not signify that this is therefore an easy option for the candidate. The candidate may have a good, overall knowledge of the topic, which obviously could be beneficial, but it will be necessary to read the question with the utmost care taking due note of any key words so that candidate can respond in a direct manner to that particular question and not simply offload everything known about the topic area. The skill lies in the ability to adapt one's knowledge to the specific demands of the question. It is a skill that needs practice.

As usual, a wide range of ability was seen again this year, particularly in the fluency and accuracy of the English. Weaker scripts are sometimes so full of errors in the English that the meaning of the content is obscured.

There were a few rubric infringements where two questions were answered from one section.

Use of time

A number of candidates spend too long writing at unnecessary length on the first essay, which means rushing to complete the second essay. These essays tend to be rather short and with the need for speed in order to finish, the accuracy of the English often suffers.

Too many candidates do not make sufficient notes or diagrams to chart their essays. Sometimes, after writing a page or two, the essay is abandoned and the candidate embarks on a different answer. This is clearly a self-penalising waste of time and can lead to there being no time for a thorough language check before handing the paper in at the end of the examination session.

Use of English

As in previous sessions Examiners see evidence of a wide range of ability to write English fluently. Some candidates have virtually full operational command of the language and therefore score highly in the Use of English mark but the weakest candidates are unable to express themselves with any real accuracy. 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.

It is a shame that the same errors occur year after year. A systematic eradication of the very common errors in the following list is the quickest route to higher marks for the use of English element of an essay's score.

- non-agreement of subject
- missing endings on plural nouns because of carelessness and/or poor checking
- frequent incorrect use of definite and indefinite articles

- confusion between their/there, to/too, here/hear
- incorrect use of apostrophes
- incorrect comparative forms such as more easier/ more richer/ more harder
- incorrect use of commas leading to loss and/or ambiguity of meaning
- words not separated e.g. 'alot' and 'infact'

The need for a final, systematic language check in the last ten minutes or so of the examination still needs to be emphasised to candidates. Some Centres have made noticeable improvement in this direction and it is hoped that others will follow suit so that their candidates will gain higher marks.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This question was reasonably popular. Some candidates, despite the wording of the question, chose only one group or minority because they felt this was the major issue in their respective country. Opinions on the treatment of minorities often varied widely, even from candidates of the same Centre, which seemed to reflect their status in that society, personal observation and sometimes prejudice. Better answers were supported by data from credible sources and convincing examples. Such essays frequently included issues of gender and class in addition to ethnic issues.

Question 2

This was quite a popular question. Weaker answers were narrowly focused and tended to deal solely with the dangers of nuclear weapons with little attention being given to 'put pressure on' and to 'justifiable'. Better answers discussed the neutral policing of established nuclear power installations in various countries regarding the enrichment of uranium. They looked critically at the reasons that could possibly justify the imposition of restrictions by a recognised international body. Some questioned the USA's continuing development of a nuclear arsenal alongside its attempts to prevent other countries such as Iran and North Korea, from developing a nuclear capability for the generation of electricity.

Question 3

Many candidates attempted this question and answers were often limited to the realm of personal relationships. However, many candidates supported their views with interesting and credible examples and were able to demonstrate how the occasional, little 'white lie' could be preferable to the stark truth to spare a friend's feelings in trivial matters. There was general consensus that honesty is almost always the best policy and that ultimately 'the truth will out'. Better answers also covered truth in matters of national security, religious teachings and in courts of law to ensure that justice is done without fear and favour. Politicians were singled out as the least reliable regarding the truth and better answers made it clear that concealing the full truth for political gain is also a form of telling lies.

Question 4

This was quite a popular topic and most candidates were able to offer an appropriate range of advantages and disadvantages for their own nation and/or region. It was interesting to read that cultural erosion, although generally perceived as a disadvantage in most countries, was seen in some areas also as an agent for long needed change in such matters as outdated superstitions and questionable traditions, particularly relating to gender.

Question 5

This was not a popular question. Answers were focused largely as expected on economic issues and candidates were able to produce a selection of relevant points relating to the advantages and disadvantages of hosting multinational companies in various developing countries. However, the notion of 'exercising more power' was seldom adequately developed.

Question 6

A popular question. Many candidates focused on the more obvious perils of smoking, alcohol consumption and drug taking. Many of those candidates who responded to 'what more' felt that enough time, money and effort has already been spent on trying to get people weaned off potentially fatal habits with little perceived

success. Therefore further action along these lines was likely to prove similarly unsuccessful. Alternative measures included huge price increases or a total ban on the production and sales of alcohol and tobacco, both of which were argued without little consideration of practicality and viability, not to mention economic constraints and outcomes. Better answers focused also on diet, exercise, responsible sexual behaviour and sedentary lifestyles.

Question 7

A reasonably popular question. Most candidates recognised the ever increasing global demand for more electricity and the depletion of non-renewable resources. They were aware of a wide range of renewable resources but tended to describe them rather than assessing them on a cost/benefit basis. It was too glibly assumed that these alternatives could quite easily meet global needs. Only the best answers dealt with energy-saving. Some candidates did not mention nuclear energy at all and many of those who did were unaware of the prevailing safeguards in this industry which would preclude a second Chernobyl.

Question 8

The term 'rich countries' was rarely exemplified and this caused much generalisation and some sweeping assertions. Similarly, few candidates realised that poorer people in rich countries can fare worse technologically than rich people in poorer countries. Better answers acknowledged that richer countries bear enormous research and development costs and therefore deserve to have first use of new technological products. Only the very best responses considered that the latest hi-tech products are not always appropriate to the needs of developing countries and that the sale of outdated but functional and effective technological products at bargain basement prices, from the developed to developing countries, is a much more sensible solution.

Question 9

In many instances 'control' was overlooked or only occurred implicitly. Some candidates recognised the dangers of becoming too dependent on technology and felt that the driving need felt by many people to have the very latest gadgets could lead to laziness and excessive time being wasted on such things as mobile phones and electronic games. Better candidates indicated how we are already being 'controlled' by being monitored by invasive CCTV installations and tracking software on computers.

Question 10

Quite a number of candidates paid insufficient heed to the wording of this question. 'The most exciting development' clearly refers to *one* development. Similarly, the question clearly asks for one development from 'science or technology or medicine.' Some candidates discussed three or more developments, others selected one item from each of the alternatives of science/technology/medicine. The 'why do you find it exciting' aspect of the question was often underplayed or even totally ignored. Fortunately, many of those who adhered to the wording of the essay produced work of a good standard.

Question 11

An extremely popular topic and often well done. Weaker answers lapsed into generalised comment on music's various attractions, with limited reference to personal involvement and insufficient supporting examples. In some cases, no musicians, composers or specific pieces of music were named. Better answers were understandably dominated by those who actually played an instrument, were brought up in a musical family and who had been exposed to music from the earliest age; indeed some extolled the advantages of having been exposed to music while still in the womb. Their essays were more analytical than descriptive with the 'in your own life' aspect given close focus.

Question 12

There were relatively few takers for this question. Given that a significant number of candidates answering it came from multilingual societies, it was surprising that few saw this as the main thrust of their answer. Scant attention was paid to the issue of cultural versus national identities or the possible implications of the supremacy of one language in a multilingual country. Greater consideration was given to learning foreign languages, particularly English, as it is seen as a universal language and therefore important for many professions and for good job prospects.

Language as access and insight to different societies and cultures and/or as a means of a deeper appreciation of one's native tongue was scarcely mentioned.

Question 13

The general feeling was that more emphasis should be given to the arts in school because of the perceived need for well-rounded individuals with skills such as creativity, innovation, confidence and cultural understanding and awareness. Better answerers were able to support their claims with appropriate examples while weaker answers tended to be generalised with some confusion between art and arts.

Question 14

Few candidates opted for this question but those that did were often very knowledgeable and obviously, in some cases, aficionados which meant that they were able to provide a wide range of appropriate examples. Better answers were able to trace the historic development of cartoons and animation from very early Disney up to the present day with some interesting points recorded about the messages contained in cartoons, their role in children's development and the nature of their appeal to all ages. The 'social' value generally received more attention than the 'artistic' angle.

Question 15

This question was surprisingly unpopular, with only a handful of responses received. A few poorer answers offered little apart from generalities whilst the odd stronger response was able to illustrate how regional issues had been positively influenced by global reaction.