

Cambridge International AS & A Level

THINKING SKILLS**9694/21**

Paper 2 Critical Thinking

May/June 2026**MARK SCHEME**Maximum Mark: 50

Published

This mark scheme contains the instructions and marking guidance that our examiners used to mark candidate responses for this component.

Before they start marking, examiners complete a standardisation process. They review a range of candidate responses and discuss the mark scheme in detail to agree which answers can and cannot be accepted. Examiners award marks where it is clear that candidate responses have met the requirements of the mark scheme. These requirements may vary between different components or different versions of the same component, depending on the exact requirements of the question and the candidate responses seen during the standardisation process.

Sometimes, our mark schemes may allow marks to be awarded to responses which contain elements that are factually incorrect or for content not covered by the syllabus. We do this in response to the demands of a specific question to support candidates and make sure that our assessments are fair. However, these allowances should not be used as a guide for teaching and learning.

We cannot discuss the mark scheme with schools, and we recommend that schools read the mark scheme together with the assessment material and the Principal Examiner Report for Teachers.

This document consists of **15** printed pages.

General marking principles

All examiners must apply these marking principles when marking candidate responses.

1	Examiners must award marks for each response in line with: - the specific content defined in the mark scheme - the specific skills defined in the mark scheme or in the level descriptions - the standard of response required as exemplified by the standardisation scripts.
2	Examiners must award whole marks (not half marks, or other fractions).
3	Examiners must award marks positively . This means that: - marks are not deducted for errors or omissions - marks are awarded for correct/valid answers as defined in the mark scheme and also for other valid answers which go beyond the scope of the syllabus and mark scheme referring to your team leader as appropriate - the quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar are judged only when the mark scheme indicates that these features are specifically assessed in the question. However, the meaning of all responses must be unambiguous.
4	Examiners must consistently apply the requirements of the mark scheme and any rules for what to do when candidates have not followed instructions correctly.
5	Examiners must use the full range of marks defined in the mark scheme, unless limited by the quality of the candidate responses seen.
6	Examiners must award marks according to the mark scheme and must not award marks with grade thresholds or grade descriptions in mind.

Annotations guidance for centres

Examiners use a system of annotations as a shorthand for communicating their marking decisions to one another. Examiners are trained during the standardisation process on how and when to use annotations. The purpose of annotations is to inform the standardisation and monitoring processes and guide the supervising examiners when they are checking the work of examiners within their team. The meaning of annotations and how they are used is specific to each component and is understood by all examiners who mark the component.

We publish annotations in our mark schemes to help centres understand the annotations they may see on copies of scripts. Note that there may not be a direct correlation between the number of annotations on a script and the mark awarded. Similarly, the use of an annotation may not be an indication of the quality of the response.

The annotations listed below were available to examiners marking this component in this series.

Annotations

Annotation	Meaning
	In Qs 1, 3 and 4 use to indicate where each mark has been awarded (except in Q1(a)).
	Use to indicate an answer or element that is wrong.
NGE	Not good enough. Use wherever such a judgment has been made.
BOD	Benefit of doubt. Use in conjunction with other annotations.
AE	In Q3 use to indicate 'significant additional element'. In Q5 use to indicate creditworthy other argument element.
CON	In Qs 2 and 5 use to indicate 'conclusion'.
EVAL	In Q2 use to indicate creditworthy evaluation of a source.
I	In Q5 use to indicate creditworthy intermediate conclusion.
P	In Q2 use to indicate creditworthy personal thinking. In Q3 use to indicate paraphrase.
R	In Q2 use to indicate creditworthy inferential reasoning. In Q5 use to indicate creditworthy reason used to support a conclusion.
S	In Q2 use to indicate creditworthy use of a source. In Q5 use to indicate distinct strand of reasoning.
	In appropriate cases, use to indicate significant omission. In Q3 use to indicate 'significant omission'.
SEEN	Use when an element of an answer which would normally be credited cannot receive a mark because of a rubric; e.g., in Q5 use when a type of argument element has already been credited in the same strand of reasoning. Use in answers when no other annotations have been used. Use on blank pages.

Annotation	Meaning
<i>Highlighter</i>	Use to draw attention to part of an answer.

Question	Answer	Marks
1(a)	<i>Is Source D an argument? Justify your answer.</i> <i>2-mark answer (3 ticks)</i> - Source D is an argument ✓. The conclusion is ‘Adults should stop thinking of boredom as a bad thing for children.’ ✓ This conclusion is supported by reasons and evidence. ✓ <i>1-mark answers (2 ticks)</i> - Source D is an argument ✓. The conclusion is ‘Adults should stop thinking of boredom as a bad thing for children.’ ✓ - Source D is an argument ✓. It consists of a conclusion supported by reasoning. ✓ <i>0-mark answers (1 tick or 0 ticks)</i> - Source D is an argument ✓, because it contains more than one point of view X. - Source D is not an argument X.....	2
1(b)	<i>How reliably can it be concluded from Source A that being bored causes anti-social behaviour?</i> (Not very reliably.) - Research has shown that there is a correlation between boredom and aggressiveness [1], - which may well mean that the former causes the latter [1]. - Some criminals have said that they offended because they were bored [1]. <i>Accept:</i> - Some of the symptoms mentioned, particularly ‘lack of interest in activities’, ‘difficulty in remaining motivated’, ‘lack of a sense of excitement’ and feeling tired, tend to cause people to avoid social contact [1]. However, ... - A correlation between boredom and aggressiveness is not enough to claim that boredom <i>causes</i> aggressiveness / An aggressive personality may make people more inclined to be bored, rather than <i>vice versa</i> [1]. - It may have been relatively few people who said that they offended because they were bored [1]. - The fact that criminals said this was the reason for their actions does not necessarily mean it is true [1]. - They may not have known why they offended / they may not have wanted to admit their real motivation / they may have given the answer they thought the researchers wanted [1]. <i>Accept:</i> - Some of the bad behaviour mentioned, particularly rioting, involves other people (and in that respect boredom does not cause people to avoid social contact) [1]. <i>Maximum 2 marks if only one side is considered.</i>	3

Question	Answer	Marks
1(c)	Assess the reliability of Source D. <i>1 mark for each valid point up to maximum of 3.</i> - You don't need any kind of reputation to write a blog [1]. - As a paediatrician/mother, she has good ability to see the behaviour of children (in relation to boredom) [1]. - Her only vested interest would be to give accurate and helpful information in order to gain more patients/readers [1]. - As a paediatrician, she has good expertise in the behaviour of children [1]. - She would have no apparent reason to be biased on the topic of parenting [1].	3
1(d)	Identify and explain two weaknesses in the support given by Source C to its claim that 'Most lawyers are bored at work.' <i>Award up to 2 marks each for up to 2 of the following:</i> - The group surveyed consists only of people seeking a new job (<i>allow</i> who have left their jobs) [1], whereas the claim refers to 'most lawyers', which is a much broader category / most lawyers may find their work stimulating and have no intention of changing it / lawyers who are not seeking a new job may not be bored / there is likely to be a higher proportion of lawyers in this sample who are bored / it cannot be concluded that lawyers not seeking new jobs are bored. [1]. - The statistic appears to refer to people working in the field of law, rather than lawyers [1]. It is feasible that other workers in law offices, courts, etc. are more likely than practising lawyers to be bored at work [1]. - The respondents consisted only of clients of one agency (looking for new jobs in one type of work) [1]; therefore the number is (probably) too small to use as the basis of a reliable inference [1]. <i>Award the 2nd mark <u>only</u> if the 1st mark has been given.</i> - Some people who are looking for a new job may not want to divulge their real reasons for doing so [1]; therefore the reasons given may not be entirely truthful [1]. - It is likely that respondents had to choose from a number of options [1], and none of them may have been close enough to their precise motives / they may have had several reasons [1].	4

Question	Answer	Marks
1(e)	<i>‘In order to appreciate music properly, it is necessary to give your full attention to it.’</i> <i>How effectively does this claim counter the advice in Source E to play music while studying?</i> <i>1 mark for each valid point.</i> Not effectively [1], because the advice given refers to using music as a way of making a boring task bearable, and not in order to appreciate it [1]. <i>Award the judgment mark only if it has some support (not necessarily enough to be awarded a mark in its own right).</i>	2

Question	Answer	Marks										
2	<i>‘Being bored is not necessarily bad for people.’</i> 1 mark for an explicit supported conclusion <table border="1"><tr><td colspan="2">Up to 7 marks from the following:</td></tr><tr><td>Use of sources</td><td>2 marks for use of 4 or 5 sources 1 mark for use of 1–3 sources</td></tr><tr><td>Evaluation of sources</td><td>1 mark for each valid evaluation of the reliability or quality of reasoning in sources <i>Maximum 3 marks</i></td></tr><tr><td>Inferential reasoning from sources</td><td>1 mark each <i>Maximum 3 marks</i> <i>Source must be mentioned for this to be credited</i></td></tr><tr><td>Personal thinking</td><td>1 mark each <i>Maximum 2 marks</i></td></tr></table> Annotate answers as follows: CON To indicate ‘conclusion’. S To indicate creditworthy use of source. EVAL To indicate creditworthy evaluation of source. R To indicate creditworthy inferential reasoning. P To indicate creditworthy personal thinking. X To indicate incorrect material. Indicative content • Source A shows that boredom can be a negative experience, • including bad social consequences, • but Source B shows that boredom can also provide opportunities for creativity • and can have economic benefits. • The reliability of the psychologist quoted in Source B is enhanced by specialist expertise. • Source C shows that boredom is often the reason given by people who want to change jobs, • but the source greatly exaggerates the significance of the survey. • Source D indicates how boredom can be a positive experience for children;	Up to 7 marks from the following:		Use of sources	2 marks for use of 4 or 5 sources 1 mark for use of 1–3 sources	Evaluation of sources	1 mark for each valid evaluation of the reliability or quality of reasoning in sources <i>Maximum 3 marks</i>	Inferential reasoning from sources	1 mark each <i>Maximum 3 marks</i> <i>Source must be mentioned for this to be credited</i>	Personal thinking	1 mark each <i>Maximum 2 marks</i>	8
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Question	Answer	Marks
2	- this source is based on good expertise and ability to see. - Source E gives a range of practical suggestions for dealing with boredom, - which implies that boredom is problematic, - but also that the problems are not too grave, since techniques to ameliorate them are available. Example 8-mark answer (233 words) S Source A identifies various ways in which being bored may be bad for people. However, S Source B shows that boredom can provide opportunities for creativity, which is good for people. Since these sources come from a magazine aimed at the general reader, they do not necessarily have more than moderate expertise. EVAL R This link between boredom and creativity is corroborated by Source D, which explains how boredom S can be a positive experience for children; this source is based on good expertise and ability to see, since its author is a paediatrician and a parent. EVAL S Source C shows that boredom is often the reason given by people who want to change jobs, which R suggests that employers who wish to avoid the expense of recruiting and training new staff should try to help existing employees not to feel bored by their work. However, although Source C has excellent expertise and ability to see the reasons given by their clients, we do not know what range of reasons respondents had to choose from, and they may not have wanted to disclose their real reasons for seeking a move. EVAL S Source E gives a range of practical suggestions for dealing with boredom, some of which R imply that boredom is to some extent unavoidable in life. Although boredom clearly can be a bad thing, overall these sources lead me to agree that being bored CON is not necessarily bad for people.	

Question	Answer	Marks
In Q3, annotate as follows: AE Significant additional element A Significant omission P Paraphrase <i>In Q3(a), (c), and (d), if two answers are given, one of which is correct, award 1 mark.</i> <i>In all parts of Q3, apply guidance relating to additional material only if it constitutes an additional part of an answer or an alternative answer.</i>		
3(a)	Identify the main conclusion. <i>2 marks for an exact answer</i> <i>1 mark for a paraphrase, or for one additional element or omission</i> All personal titles should be abolished.	2
3(b)	Identify two intermediate conclusions from paragraphs 1 to 3. <i>For up to 2 of the following:</i> <i>2 marks for an exact answer</i> <i>1 mark for a paraphrase, or for one additional element or omission</i> - Abolishing titles completely would be the obvious next step towards equality. (So) all inherited titles should now be removed. - they [political or professional titles] should not be used at all.	4
3(c)	Identify one counter-assertion. <i>2 marks for an exact version of the following:</i> <i>1 mark for a paraphrase of the following, or for one additional element or omission:</i> (It may seem obvious that) one should ask other people how they would prefer to be addressed. <i>Allow for 1 mark either of:</i> - Some people who have political or professional titles [such as 'Councilman' or 'Her Honour'] like to use those titles in private life as well as at work. - Someone may not want a casual acquaintance to use their first name.	2

Question	Answer	Marks
3(d)	<i>Abolishing titles completely would be the obvious next step towards equality, because there are many good reasons why someone might not wish everyone who addresses them to have to mention their gender.</i> <i>This piece of reasoning relies on assumptions which are not stated in the passage.</i> <i>Identify one of these unstated assumptions.</i> <i>2 marks for an exact version of either of the following: 1 mark for an incomplete or vague version of either of the following:</i> • All titles identify the addressee's gender. • Abolishing titles would cause speakers to mention other people's gender less. • Having one's gender stated disadvantages some categories of person by comparison with others. <i>Examples of 1-mark answers:</i> • Some titles identify the addressee's gender. • Not stating a person's gender promotes equality.	2

Question	Answer	Marks
4(a)	Identify and explain a flaw of conflation in paragraph 2. Inherited wealth is conflated with inherited titles [1]. People who have inherited titles are not necessarily rich [1]. If inherited titles were to be removed, people with inherited wealth would retain it [1]. In order to prevent people from being rich because a remote ancestor was rich, it would be necessary to remove their wealth, not necessarily their titles [1].	2
4(b)	Identify and evaluate an appeal in paragraph 3. The reference to a psychiatrist is an appeal to authority (<i>accept</i> expertise, <i>accept</i> ethos) [1]. It is an effective appeal, because their expertise as a psychiatrist (working with powerful people) is relevant to this issue [1]. However, it is only one psychiatrist, and it is possible that colleagues do not share their opinion. [1].	2
4(c)	Identify and explain one flaw or weakness in the reasoning in paragraph 3. <i>Either</i> The final sentence of the paragraph restricts the options / is a rash (hasty) generalisation [1] by claiming that, since titles should not be used in some situations, they should not be used at all [1], thereby ignoring the plausible claim that they should be used in some circumstances but not others [1]. <i>Or</i> The claim that ‘there are some situations in which you should certainly not use these titles’ is a dubious [1] unsupported claim [1].	2
4(d)	Identify and explain a causal (cum hoc) flaw in paragraph 4. Degree results have improved in the period during which relationships between teachers and students have been less formal / there is a correlation between increased informality between teachers and students and improved degree results / the increased informality of relationships and improved degree results may be coincidental [1]. But this does not justify concluding that the increased informality caused the improvement in degree results [1]. <i>Award the 2nd mark <u>only</u> if the 1st mark has been given.</i>	2
4(e)	Identify and explain one flaw or weakness in the reasoning in paragraph 5. The final sentence of para 5 is a Personal Attack (<i>argumentum ad hominem</i>) [1]. Instead of addressing the arguments of those who disagree with this author’s proposal [1], it criticises their motives/character [1] without offering any proof that the criticism is justified [1].	2

Question	Answer	Marks										
5	‘All human beings should be treated as equal to one another.’ 1 mark for an explicit supported conclusion <i>Must use the precise wording of the claim or an acceptable negation.</i> <i>Must not be expressed as an opinion.</i> <table><tr><td colspan="2">Up to 7 marks from the following:</td></tr><tr><td>Reasons</td><td>2 marks for three or more reasons supporting conclusions 1 mark for one or two reasons supporting conclusions</td></tr><tr><td>Inferential reasoning</td><td>1 mark for each use of an intermediate conclusion or chain of intermediate conclusions <i>(including if used in a response to a counter)</i> <i>Maximum 3 marks</i></td></tr><tr><td>Argument elements</td><td>1 mark for each use of other argument elements that strengthens the reasoning: counter with response, example, evidence, analogy, hypothetical reasoning <i>Credit each type only once per strand of reasoning</i> <i>Maximum 3 marks</i></td></tr><tr><td>Structure</td><td>1 mark for two or more distinct strands of reasoning</td></tr></table> <i>Each component of a candidate response may score only once. Where there is more than one possibility, use the classification which leads to the higher total mark.</i> <i>No credit for material unrelated to the claim given on the question paper.</i> <i>No credit for material reproduced from the passage.</i> Annotate answers as follows: CON To indicate main conclusion. R To indicate creditworthy reason used to support a conclusion. I To indicate creditworthy intermediate conclusion. AE To indicate creditworthy other argument element. S To indicate distinct strand of reasoning. SEEN When a type of argument element has already been credited in the same strand of reasoning. X To indicate material that is judged not to have a structural function the argument. Use highlighter to indicate material which is not relevant to the stated claim or is derived from the passage.	Up to 7 marks from the following:		Reasons	2 marks for three or more reasons supporting conclusions 1 mark for one or two reasons supporting conclusions	Inferential reasoning	1 mark for each use of an intermediate conclusion or chain of intermediate conclusions <i>(including if used in a response to a counter)</i> <i>Maximum 3 marks</i>	Argument elements	1 mark for each use of other argument elements that strengthens the reasoning: counter with response, example, evidence, analogy, hypothetical reasoning <i>Credit each type only once per strand of reasoning</i> <i>Maximum 3 marks</i>	Structure	1 mark for two or more distinct strands of reasoning	8
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Structure	1 mark for two or more distinct strands of reasoning											

Question	Answer	Marks
5	Example 8-mark answers <i>Support (155 words)</i> Most of the problems in the world have been caused by discrimination on the basis of characteristics which are morally irrelevant, such as gender and origin. If someone is visibly different from ourselves, it is regrettably likely that we will treat them badly. Moral and political progress has largely consisted of attempting to frustrate this natural tendency towards unjust discrimination, but it has not been wholly successful. Everyone should therefore make an effort to ignore superficial differences between persons. The world as we know it is marked by inequality of wealth, income and opportunities. Those of us who are amongst the 'haves' may like to imagine that we deserve our favoured position, but it is not true, because we have done nothing to earn our parentage, our nationality or our potential. So we have no moral right to consider anyone inferior to ourselves. Therefore all human beings should be treated as equal to one another. <i>Challenge (115 words)</i> From the moment of their birth, people are different from one another. For example, some babies learn to walk sooner than others and some begin talking at a younger age. From babyhood onwards, everyone has different life opportunities and experiences. Anyone who claims that all people are equal is therefore ignoring reality. Treating everyone the same would be wasteful in resources, because everyone's potential is different. If a high school decided to give extra tuition in mathematics to all its students, it would be useful to some, but others would not need it, while others would be incapable of benefitting from it. Therefore all human beings should not be treated as equal to one another.	

Question	Answer	Marks
5	<i>Acceptable ‘challenge’ conclusions:</i> • All human beings should not be treated as equal to one another. • All human beings should not necessarily be treated as equal to one another. • Not all human beings should be treated as equal to one another.	