CAMBRIDGE
International Education

Cambridge International AS & A Level

THINKING SKILLS **9694/22**

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.

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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.

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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.

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Annotation	**Meaning**
Highlighter	Use to draw attention to part of an answer.

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Question	Answer	Marks
1(a)	***Is Source A an argument? Justify your answer.*** *2 marks for a correct answer with accurate explanation* *1 mark for a correct answer with vague, incomplete or generic explanation* *0 marks for a correct answer without explanation* *0 marks for an incorrect answer with or without explanation* *2-mark answer (3 ticks)* • Source A is not an argument ✓. It consists of a description* of what Tai Chi is ✓, but there is no (supported, persuasive) conclusion ✓. • Source A is not an argument ✓. It consists of a description* of what Tai Chi is ✓, but does not attempt to persuade ✓. *1-mark answers (2 ticks)* • Source A is not an argument ✓, because it does not include a (supported, persuasive) conclusion ✓. • Source A is not an argument ✓. It consists of a description* of what Tai Chi is ✓. * Accept 'explanation' or any other suitable word instead of 'description'. *0-mark answer (1 or 0 ticks)* • Source A is not an argument ✓, because it does not include two contrasting opinions ✗. • Source A is an argument ✗…	**2**
1(b)	***Identify and explain two weaknesses in the support given by Source B for its claim that 'Practising Tai Chi minimises the risk of being affected by type 2 diabetes.'*** *For each of up to two weaknesses, 1 mark for identifying and 1 mark for explaining a weakness. For example,* • A reduction in a person's waist circumference does not alter the risk posed by other factors **[1]**, so cannot be said to 'minimise' the risk of contracting type 2 diabetes **[1]**. • Tai Chi may exacerbate other risk factors for type 2 diabetes **[1]**. • The research was not based directly on diabetes **[1]**. It used waist size as a proxy **[1]**. • The average reduction does not tell us anything about variation for individuals **[1]**. It is likely that some participants experienced a larger waist reduction while others experienced little or no reduction **[1]**. So the claim cannot be generalised to all people **[1]**. • A difference of 0.4 cm between groups 2 and 3 / an overall reduction of average waist size by 1.9 cm is not large enough to be significant in this context **[1]**. • Participants were randomly allocated to groups 1, 2 or 3 **[1]**, so there may have been relevant factors introduced by chance **[1]**. • Participants were all Chinese / aged over 40 **[1]**. The results may have been different for people of a different nationality / aged 40 or under, because… [*accept any plausible reason why this might be relevant*] **[1]**.	**4**

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Question	Answer	Marks
1(c)	***Assess the representativeness of the evidence in Source C in relation to the claim made in the first sentence of the source.*** • The claim is restricted to being about club members, as is the evidence **[1]**, of whom a broad spectrum of ages was represented **[1]**. Although, it is not stated whether or not there was an even distribution of ages **[1]**, so the results may disproportionately represent a particular age group **[1]**. • The survey was only offered to a limited number of people / club members who had started to learn Tai Chi within the last two years **[1]**. These people are likely to be more aware of improvements they have experienced since they started / be more enthusiastic than established members / the effects of Tai Chi may be more pronounced in the early days of learning **[1]**. • However, this limitation is unlikely to be significant, because if Tai Chi was not meeting the needs of more established members, they would presumably not still be club members **[1]**. • Fewer than half of those invited to participate made the positive remarks cited in the source **[1]**. • The respondents were self-selected and therefore quite likely to overrepresent those members who had had positive experiences **[1]**. *If only one side argued, cap at 2 marks.*	**3**
1(d)	***How relevant is Source D in relation to a claim that practising Tai Chi is good for people's health and well-being?*** Not relevant **[1]**. The claim is only about the health and general well-being benefits for people who practise Tai Chi **[1]**, but the disadvantages listed in Source D are focussed on other aspects of learning and practising Tai Chi that have no bearing on such benefits **[1]**. *Do not credit judgment only*.	**2**
1(e)	***Assess the reliability of Source E.*** Partly reliable. • A national association is likely to have a good **reputation [1]**, • and a **vested interest** to maintain this reputation by providing accurate information to people viewing its website **[1]**. • It also has a good **ability to perceive** how the presence of a Tai Chi instructor helps the learning process / **expertise** in how best to learn Tai Chi **[1]**. • However, it also has a **vested interest** to act in such a way as to encourage its members to remain affiliated to the organisation **[1]**, • and to encourage people to pay the instructor-members to teach them **[1]**. *No credit for judgment.* *If only one side argued, cap at 2 marks.*	**3**

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Question	Answer	Marks
2	***'Everyone should seriously consider learning Tai Chi.'*** **1 mark for an explicit supported conclusion**	**8**

Up to 7 marks from the following:	
Use of sources	2 marks for use of at least 3* sources 1 mark for use of 1 or 2 sources * *Candidates may make use of Source A, but are not expected to do so.*
Evaluation of sources	1 mark for each valid evaluation of the reliability or quality of reasoning in sources *Maximum 3 marks*
Inferential reasoning from sources	1 mark each *Maximum 3 marks* *Source must be mentioned for this to be credited*
Personal thinking	1 mark each *Maximum 2 marks*

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.

✗ To indicate incorrect material.

Indicative content

- Source A is an explanation of what Tai Chi is.
- Source B describes a recent academic study that suggests that practising Tai Chi regularly can reduce waist circumference,
- which reduces the risk of contracting type 2 diabetes.
- However, although, as an academic study, the researchers would have had relevant expertise,
- there were some weaknesses in the support provided for the researchers' conclusion.
- Source C provides some data pertaining to how new students of Tai Chi feel that their practice has benefited them.
- There were many positive comments by the learners,
- but the evidence is not wholly representative of association members.

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Question	Answer	Marks
2	• Source D lists some disadvantages of learning modern Tai Chi, • which are not really relevant to the benefits gained by experienced practitioners. • Source E stresses the need for new students of Tai Chi to learn from an accredited instructor, rather than teaching themselves using online videos. • In this respect (but in no other), Sources D and E corroborate each other. • Source E is likely to have a vested interest in selling the services of those of its members who are qualified, experienced instructors, • and potentially is biased in favour of its members. • Nevertheless, it is likely to have a good reputation and contain relevant expertise. ***Example 8-mark answer (242 words)*** Regular practice of Tai Chi has many benefits for people. Source B shows the outcome of a study in China that found that regular participation in Tai Chi classes could be even more effective than conventional exercise in reducing waist circumference. However, although the researchers are likely to have had relevant expertise, the study focussed solely on people aged over 40 years and hence the findings may not apply to younger people. Source C explains how recent learners of Tai Chi have found it to be of great benefit to them. The source would have had good ability to see the outcomes of the survey, and these results are likely to be of wider applicability than those in Source B, because they cover a wider range of ages than the latter. Source D lists four disadvantages of learning Tai Chi, but these are not relevant to the question of whether regular practice of this ancient art brings benefits or not to practitioners. Source E, which highlights the wellness benefits to people who practise Tai Chi, partly corroborates Source D inasmuch as it stresses the need for learning via a qualified instructor. However, it has a clear vested interest to act on the collective behalf of those of its members who are qualified instructors. Overall, despite the age limitation mentioned in Source B, the sources predominantly suggest that anyone could benefit from learning Tai Chi, and hence everyone should seriously consider doing so.	

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Question	Answer	Marks
In Q3, annotate as follows: AE Significant additional element ^ Significant omission P Paraphrase *In **Q3(a)**, **(c)**, and **(d)**, if two answers are given, one of which is correct, award 1 mark.* *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.*		
3(a)	***Identify the main conclusion.*** *2 marks for an exact answer* *1 mark for a paraphrase, or for **one** additional element or omission* (So,) meritocracy is (actually) a harmful social and economic system.	**2**
3(b)	***Identify two intermediate conclusions from paragraphs 2 to 3.*** *For each of the following:* *2 marks for an exact answer* *1 mark for a paraphrase, or for **one** additional element or omission* *If more than two answers given, mark the first three only* • (However,) meritocracy is (actually) unfair. • (So) meritocracy can be viewed as justifying inequality.	**4**
3(c)	***Identify the argument element and explain the function of the following words from paragraph 3:*** ***'those who are struggling because of poverty, poor housing, or lack of educational opportunities are held responsible for the negative circumstances in which they live'*** A reason **[1]** supporting the claim that follows it (an intermediate conclusion) **[1]**. *Accept for 1 mark:* Examples of the negative circumstances in which some people have to live.	**2**

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Question	Answer	Marks
3(d)	***Meritocracy is unfair. To do well in a meritocratic system it is necessary to have certain abilities and a capacity for hard work. It is only a matter of luck whether or not we are born with these.*** ***This piece of reasoning relies on assumptions which are not stated in the passage. Identify one of these unstated assumptions.*** *2 marks for an exact version of any of the following* *1 mark for an incomplete or vague version of any of the following* • It is unfair if someone gains something through luck alone. • It is unfair to differentiate based on innate abilities. • It is not possible to develop relevant abilities or the capacity for hard work if we are not born with them.	**2**

Question	Answer	Marks
4(a)	***Identify and evaluate an appeal in paragraph 1.*** The final sentence of the paragraph is an appeal to tradition (*accept* history) **[1]**. It is a weak appeal, because the fact that a system of 'giving people what they deserve' is 'longstanding' is not an adequate reason for leaving it in place **[1]**. There may be fairer ways of distributing 'the good things of life' than according to personal merit **[1]**.	**2**
4(b)	***Evaluate the appeal to authority in paragraph 5.*** The appeal is relevant as psychologists have expertise in this area **[1]**. However, since the view is held only by 'Some psychologists', it isn't clear how much weight to give it / the view may be held by only a minority of psychologists **[1]**. But what they claim is supported by further reasoning in the paragraph / the further reasoning in the paragraph does not necessarily rely on the appeal to authority, so the argument does not rely on the appeal **[1]**.	**2**
4(c)	***Identify and explain one flaw or weakness in the reasoning in the first two sentences of paragraph 4.*** The second sentence is a Personal Attack (*argumentum ad hominem*) **[1]**. The author makes an irrelevant criticism of opponents / dismisses opponents as thoughtless and careless people **[1]**, without offering any proof that these accusations are true **[1]**.	**2**
4(d)	***Explain how the reasoning in paragraph 5 is weakened by the flaw of conflation.*** Belief in meritocracy is conflated with living under a meritocratic system **[1]**. The conclusion of the reasoning in the paragraph is about living under a meritocratic system, but the support for it refers solely to belief in meritocracy **[1]**. Living under a meritocratic system does not necessarily mean that people believe in its values **[1]**. Meritocracy as a socioeconomic system may not necessarily have the disadvantages attributed to belief in it **[1]**.	**2**

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Question	Answer	Marks
4(e)	***Identify and explain one flaw or weakness in the reasoning in paragraph 6.*** There is a restriction of options (false dichotomy) **[1]**. It is claimed that *either* we have 'a society that values concern for others' *or* we have a meritocratic society, but not both **[1]**; however, it may be possible to combine elements of both types of society / having 'concern for others' is not necessarily incompatible with valuing 'competition and the pursuit of one's own good' **[1]**. *Or* The reasoning relies on an unsupported dubious claim that 'meritocracy values competition and the pursuit of one's own good' **[1]**. If this claim is untrue then the conclusion of the paragraph is not supported **[1]**.	**2**

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Question	Answer	Marks
5	***'All school-leavers should complete one year's paid service for their local communities.'*** **1 mark for an explicit supported conclusion** *Must use the precise wording of the claim or an acceptable negation.* *Must **not** be expressed as an opinion.*	**8**

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 *(including if used in a response to a counter)* *Maximum 3 marks*
Argument elements	1 mark for each use of other argument elements that strengthens the reasoning: counter with response, example, evidence, analogy, hypothetical reasoning *Credit each type only once per strand of reasoning* *Maximum 3 marks*
Structure	1 mark for two or more distinct strands of reasoning

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.

No credit for material unrelated to the claim given on the question paper.
No credit for material reproduced from the passage.

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.

✗ — To indicate material that is judged not to have a structural function in the argument.

Use ***highlighter*** to indicate material which is not relevant to the stated claim or is derived from the passage.

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Question	Answer	Marks
5	***Example 8-mark answers*** *Support (188 words)* School-leavers are generally young and energetic. Also, they have a wide range of interests and skills in areas such as technology, the environment, or animal welfare, so they have much to offer their local communities. In order for a community not only to survive, but also to prosper, all its members must be involved in the collective effort to make this happen. School-leavers are members of the community, and hence should play their part. Some people might argue that they have no time to do so; however, they have the rest of their lives to pursue their own projects; therefore, asking them to devote one year of service is reasonable. Also, when leaving school, people have completed one period in their lives, but have yet to start the next one, so this is an ideal time to contribute. Were they not to undertake such service, it would be very easy for adolescents, as they mature, to become disengaged from the societies in which they have grown up, thereby potentially losing the support these societies provide. Therefore, all school-leavers should complete one year's paid service for their local communities. *Challenge (184 words)* Many school-leavers intend to progress to studying at a more advanced level. To do this in subjects such as mathematics and the sciences, it is better not to have a gap between school and university. Therefore, performing community service for a year could damage some students' ability to cope with university-level studies. Adolescents have many pressures on them. Growing into adulthood is not easy. If school-leavers were obliged to perform one year's paid service, then the burden on them would be increased substantially. This extra burden may affect their mental health, so compulsory community service is potentially harmful to school-leavers.	

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Question	Answer	Marks
5	S AE It might be claimed that school-leavers ought to contribute their time to the communities in which they have grown up. However, after their formal education is ended, they R will have many decades in which to do this, and hence I there is no need to impose it upon them in adolescence. Also, such work is better performed R when done willingly rather than when it is compelled. CON So, it is not the case that all school-leavers should complete one year's paid service for their local communities. *Acceptable 'challenge' conclusions:* • All school-leavers should not complete one year's paid service for their local communities. • No school-leavers should complete one year's paid service for their local communities. • Not all school-leavers should complete one year's paid service for their local communities. • Only some school-leavers should complete one year's paid service for their local communities. • It is not the case that all school-leavers should complete one year's paid service for their local communities.	

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