

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/11

Paper 11

General comments

Centres deserve credit for the effort that is being made to prepare candidates for an examination that demands accuracy of thought and expression. These qualities were evident in those essays which were crafted with the reader in mind. Examiners want to engage in a conversation, a dialogue with the writers of the scripts.

Candidates who had a clear idea of the purpose of their writing did well. They knew their subject matter and given the wide range of questions the making of wise choices was not difficult. Many of this session's questions specifically encouraged a personal response and where the ideas expressed were compelling credit was given. Casually used anecdote and the shrill expression of opinion were limiting factors in some essays.

Time management is important and those candidates who divided their time equally between the two essays adopted the wisest strategy. In the time available there is not really much excuse for a short essay or one so long that the other suffers. Each question, which must be taken from a different section, carries an equal mark allocation. These rubric considerations need to be highlighted.

Every question in the paper requires evaluation or analysis. Often this is made clear in the wording of the question but where key words or phrases such as "assess", "to what extent", "how far", "argue" do not appear it does not mean that a purely descriptive response will do. All the questions are designed to provoke thought and development of ideas, supported by meaningful and illustrative examples.

Those essays which were full of assertions rather than discernment and analysis did not impress the Examiners. Candidates who achieved high marks for content provided evidence, ensured that their arguments were relevant to the question, and, most important of all, maintained the readers' interest.

Use of English

Accurate use of English, allied to interesting, relevant content, will always ensure marks in the higher bands. Errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar, have to be taken into account when awarding the final mark. However, where these errors do not impede meaning a candidate is not harshly penalised. Consequently if meaning comes across, irrespective of the incidence of mechanical error, a candidate can still do well. Writers who know what they mean but have weaknesses in spelling or in the use of the apostrophe are preferable to those who write accurately but say nothing.

Examiners like clarity and originality; they do not like dull, overused, or meaningless expressions, sometimes called clichés. A good rule for Centres – instruct your candidates never to use language they cannot explain, tell them to use their own words with the proviso that they do not use colloquial language inappropriately. Encountering a writer whose range of vocabulary is fresh and interesting is always a pleasure. Unfortunately too many candidates assume that by throwing in "big" words or abstract sounding ones they will impress the Examiner. How about no more *plethoras*?

Good essays have a clear structure. To achieve this some planning is necessary but not too much. Candidates who jotted down a few ideas before starting their essays invariably made a good start and then allowed their essays to develop and take shape as they continued to write. Essays derived from a planning checklist lacked vitality and originality. Candidates who have a clear idea about a topic, an idea which runs through the essay, never confuse the reader. They start their paragraphs with an important point, explain it and illustrate it. In the same way they make sure that every sentence is a building block contributing to the argument that is being made.

The framework that holds all of this together is the paragraph. Every paragraph, like every sentence, should relate to the one before it and indicate what is to come next. Do not leave the reader with the task of unravelling what you are trying to say.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This was a popular question and those who took note of the pronoun “you” in the question provided responses that were personally meaningful as well as objectively interesting. The most impressive responses considered the issues mentioned in the question, “age, sex, and background”, but went beyond these areas to reflect upon race, religion, and education. A few answers were weakened by the overuse of informally expressed anecdote. A few very interesting answers explored how political and social systems perpetuate and codify discrimination.

Question 2

Several candidates defined slavery very perceptively, linking their knowledge of historical slavery with the practice’s modern features. Several interesting answers convincingly widened the definition of slavery, arguing that today many of us are in thrall to money, technology and sex. Knowledge of how vulnerable people are sold for the pleasure and profit of others was evident in many essays and these issues were dealt with sensitively and trenchantly. A few candidates confused slavery and racism, but the legacy of slavery in America was a relevant point remarked upon by several. Unfortunately there were instances where too much time was spent on the historical background.

Question 3

This question, at its best, provided Examiners with a rare treat. Candidates wrote about aspects of their national culture and its people which clearly differentiated these from anywhere else in the world. This had to be done otherwise the meaning of the word “unique” would have been lost. Unfortunately the common misconception that the word means special caused problems in a significant number of essays; many candidates described qualities that could be ascribed to people of many countries such as diligence, politeness, patriotism. This question starts with the key word “evaluate” which makes it plain that a list of characteristics would only constitute a very average response.

Question 4

This question was relatively popular and responses generally split into two camps; those which abhorred not participating in elections given the struggles of our forebears to win the right to vote and those which argued that the system was so corrupt that voting was meaningless. Good answers considered countries other than the candidate’s own while others suggested, thoughtfully, that it may be essential to vote in some circumstances and not so essential in others.

Question 5

Most candidates recognised that the statement in the question is an accurate reflection of how things are; girls and women participate less in sport than boys and men. The question attracted a few answers and some of these, unfortunately, were chauvinistic. Too many male candidates poured undisguised scorn on female participation in mainstream sport which raises a general point; candidates should be wary of choosing a question that appears to play to their prejudices. If they do they are unlikely to achieve marks in the higher bands. Moreover the keywords “inevitable” and “desirable” received scant attention. There were also obvious and exaggerated reasons put forward for the lack female participation concerning physical attributes and physique. Where the inclusion of sports’ personalities advanced a thoughtful argument candidates did well but where they simply paid tribute to their favourites, they did not.

Question 6

This was a popular question and the majority of the candidates successfully challenged the view that the computer has failed our educational needs in school. The many advantages of IT were recognised and usually the dangers, such as its distracting potential, were not over emphasised. There were interesting points on global communication's power to enrich personal and social education. A pleasing number of responses were very alive to the damaging consequences of plagiarism. A few answers forgot about the required context, the school, and wrote about computers in general. Good answers explored how the computer can improve presentation of work, enhance research skills, and provide teachers with a range of effective teaching and learning strategies.

Question 7

This was a popular choice and most of the responses provided a variety of scenarios chosen to highlight the dangers to personal privacy which social networks like Facebook have exposed us. A few essays, the very good ones, reflected upon modern attitudes to personal privacy. Many expressed disbelief or even outrage at what some people are prepared to reveal but only a few asked why. They ignored the change in attitude. However several candidates thoughtfully questioned the ethics of employers and universities who check people's profiles. Many of the candidates have grown up in a world where every experience is shared and this enormous social change was recognised by the Examiners. In this context discussion of reality TV proved to be an astute addition to answers.

Question 8

Fortunately only a few candidates evaded the question by concentrating solely on issues of animal cruelty. Better answers talked about stem cell research and computer modelling. In an essay such as this examples are essential to prove the value of the advances and how they have occurred. Most candidates agreed that animal testing prevents undue delay in bringing forward new treatments but seemed not to ask themselves how much they really knew about the topic. This sort of question is best attempted by those who have strong factual knowledge.

Question 9

This was a very popular question and where candidates consistently compared and contrasted the two threats, giving due weight to each, they wrote convincingly. However far too many responses ignored international terrorism and proceeded to convey all they knew about or understood by global warming. Political differences over global warming were considered but usually only in a very partisan way. A few candidates confused international terrorism with the arms race. All of the Examiners would have liked to see more of the candidates engaging in the debate that was clearly demanded by the question. Thoughtful candidates pointed out that counteracting global warming is a complex and far-reaching task whereas dealing with international terrorism is something that faces us in the here and now.

Candidates needed to read and study the wording of this question carefully and not be mesmerised by one or other part of it. There was no lack of knowledge but it was not always deployed effectively.

Question 10

There were very few responses to this question but those that chose it wrote sensitively and thoughtfully. Some attested to the power of faith in helping individuals to overcome adversity. Others, while acknowledging the faith that underpins trust in God, indicated in measured ways how difficult it is to believe that a compassionate Divinity, irrespective of our free will, can possibly exist in our manifestly unjust world.

Question 11

The candidates who offered a convincing range of reasons for the retention of handwriting did what was required of them on this question. Those who dismissed handwriting as outmoded in our computer age were not responding to the question set. To do well on this question candidates needed to read it carefully. Thoughtful answers talked about the tradition of the form, its aesthetic appeal, the personal touch and its authenticity.

Question 12

There were some really interesting responses to this question, especially from those candidates who are familiar with different languages, linguistic influences and traditions. It was a relatively popular question and one that was answered well by those who knew something about language. That may be a statement of the obvious but it would really help candidates to do themselves justice if they chose topics only where they are convinced they have something worthwhile to contribute. Candidates who did well indicated the languages they knew and could speak, and how these have deepened their appreciation of their own culture and history. Many candidates offered an intelligent evaluation of how languages would help them in their future careers. Among the responses were a few that demonstrated how personal illustration and opinion can enhance an essay. There were some thoughtful answers on immigration, integration into society, and an understanding of the need to keep mother tongues but to learn English as well.

Question 13

This was quite a popular question but was only answered well by candidates who have a genuine love and knowledge of film. Answers which offered the opinion that a national film industry would increase a country's prestige and develop its economy but offered no local or international illustration to support their argument were adjudged too generalised and vague. Candidates who did well understood film, the film industry, and were able to support their answers with examples from different countries of how film has contributed both culturally and economically.

Question 14

There were not many responses to this question but all of them had the virtue of being interesting and informed. The keyword "timeless" was appreciated by all and several candidates went beyond clothing to consider fashion in things as diverse as jewellery and transport. Several candidates did what was expected of them; they focused on the word "timeless" and used the knowledge at their disposal to develop answers focused on this word.

Question 15

Candidates were able to describe, often in great detail, adverts that they know well. Suggesting reasons for their impact was the challenging part of the question and needed at least as much attention as the more descriptive part. All of those who responded to this question were able to offer examples and the more media savvy went on to secure a good mark by assessing techniques.

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/12

Paper 12

Key Messages

Content

- answer the set question and focus on the key words
- support your main points with appropriate examples

Use of English

- leave time to check your English thoroughly to avoid careless and basic errors
- concentrate on using vocabulary in the appropriate context

General comments

There were many detailed and thorough responses which answered the question as set and utilised a variety of relevant examples to illustrate the main points of the essay. There were also many responses which offered few or even no examples at all, resulting in vague and generalised arguments which lacked conviction and credibility.

Candidates should focus on aspects of their own country when the set question demands it; if this is not the prompt, then a broader focus is required. Many candidates demonstrated good topic knowledge and included local, regional or global examples to support their points. Weaker responses were seen where candidates wrote on topics with which they were not sufficiently familiar and provided little or no factual evidence to support their assertions.

Most candidates used the time reasonably efficiently and were able to produce two clearly structured essays of around the recommended length. Some candidates wrote unnecessarily lengthy introductions to the topic instead of focussing on the key words of the question. Less effective conclusions merely listed points from the essay, rather than arriving at a clear, personal point of view.

Rubric infringements were relatively rare as were 'short' essays i.e. fewer than 375 words. However, the quality of the Use of English was, in many cases, well below the required standard, which often obscured the content. Candidates could improve their marks substantially by avoiding really elementary errors and carelessness. A thorough and systematic check of the English, to eradicate such basic slips as those listed below in the following section, is urgently required. A substantial number of candidates have acquired a wide-ranging English vocabulary but unfortunately have not learnt to use these words in an appropriate context.

Use of English

Use of English Marks are still being needlessly wasted through basic errors. Typical examples are listed below:

- subject/verb non-agreement
- missing endings on plural nouns because of carelessness and/or poor checking
- using incorrect plural instead of singular words: electricities, behaviours, informations and technologies instead of electricity, behaviour, information and technology
- frequent incorrect use of definite and indefinite articles
- confusion between their/there, to/too, here/hear, crisis/crises and practice/practise
- incorrect comparative forms such as more easier/more richer/more better
- inaccurate use of apostrophes

- incorrect use of vocabulary

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

A reasonably popular choice which was well answered by about a third of all candidates and produced some outspoken responses from certain countries. A minority of candidates confused democratic human rights with citizens' basic needs for survival. The ineffective enforcement of such rights was often strongly emphasised and well illustrated by relevant national examples.

Question 2

A very popular choice which was very well answered by a large minority of candidates who demonstrated a clear understanding of the topic and detailed knowledge of the past and current situation in their society. Some answers would have benefited from more specific examples to support their main points. It was generally felt that some progress was being made to overcome deep-rooted discrimination based mainly on tribalism and religion.

Question 3

Not many responses and generally not well done. A significant number misinterpreted the question e.g. women suggested as 'heroes,' not men and some made scant or even no reference to the poor. 'To what extent' was often ignored or inadequately developed.

Question 4

Not very popular and seldom well answered. Often treated as a School subject with some discussion of good and bad teaching methods. Competent on history as an accurate record of past activities but very limited on the keywords 'thrilling and delightful.'

Question 5

Some good responses here to a reasonably popular question. Thoughtful answers encompassed not only political but also industrial and technological change. Some candidates tended to overlook the by-products of revolution such as loss of life and general upheaval in deference to political ideals. Popular examples included the French and Russian revolutions. Where the 'Arab Spring' was discussed, candidates frequently overestimated the progress already consolidated.

Question 6

Very few answers to this question. Mostly poor essays which ignored 'geology' and focused on global warming and its supposed impact. Virtually no reference to or examples of geological events.

Question 7

Moderately popular and a high percentage of satisfactory to good answers. Candidates showed considerable understanding and appreciation of national and regional problem areas in agriculture and were able to identify the effectiveness of current policies and measures. The best answers provided specific examples as evidence to support the claims being made.

Question 8

Not a very popular choice but often quite well answered when referring to the role of mathematics in helping in the understanding of natural phenomena and/or regulating and organising aspects of everyday human life. Aesthetic appeal i.e. 'beauty' was seldom discussed

Question 9

A very popular question which was often well answered. Better responses focused on the keyword 'solely' and acknowledged that economic reasons of some sort frequently cause human migration. However, it was also pointed out that a variety of different reasons, such as famine, drought, lack of human rights, political and religious persecution, can similarly trigger migration. Thus 'mainly' would be more accurate than 'solely.'

Question 10

Another very popular question. Some Centres had obviously prepared a question on overpopulation and the ability of candidates to adapt and integrate that theme into this question varied considerably. Better answers also dealt with underpopulation and the differing family traditions and practices in rural and urban environments in various countries. Due emphasis was also given to family budgets and the necessity in most societies to be able to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, care and educational opportunities for all children, irrespective of gender.

Question 11

Not overly popular but quite well answered by a few keen amateur photographers who showed good technical awareness of the capabilities of the latest digital cameras. Unfortunately, some showed limited perception of the required aspects in the keywords 'skilful and creative.'

Question 12

Not too popular and not very well answered by most. Few examples offered of any dramas and dances and 'communication' was often limited to exchanges between actors and dancers with little or no reference to the audience. There was a general shortage of appropriate material in most answers. Some candidates did refer briefly to facial expressions and physical movement, in actors and dancers, denoting different emotions and feelings.

Question 13

Moderately popular and often reasonably well answered and this is obviously a genre appreciated by young people. A selection of science fiction films was named and discussed in some detail and the reasons for their appeal were generally plausible thanks to the provision of some specific and appropriate examples.

Question 14

Fairly popular with quite a number of satisfactory to good examples from candidates who answered the question as set. Weaker responses were seen where candidates handicapped themselves unnecessarily by discussing literary works which were not novels as the question required and some confined themselves to one novel and not 'at least two novels' as the question clearly specified.

Question 15

Quite a popular question. Higher scoring answers traced the 'need to play' in strict accordance with the wording of the question. Thus all age groups, from babies through to old age, were assessed regarding the need to play and revealed the specific benefits for each group and any possible drawbacks. Weaker responses were seen where candidates took a more generalised approach to the 'need to play' and made little reference to the specific wishes of the different age groups.

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/13

Paper 13

Key Messages

Content

- focus on the keywords in the question
- support your main points with appropriate examples

Use of English

- check your English thoroughly to avoid carelessness
- avoid writing in a 'chatty' informal style

General comments

There were many detailed and thorough responses which addressed the question as set taking due note of the keywords and supplying a variety of relevant examples to illustrate the main points. Unfortunately, a considerable number of responses contained few or even no examples, resulting in vague and generalised arguments which provided no credible evidence to support the claims being made.

Candidates should focus on their own country when prompted to in the question; if this is not the case, then a broader focus is required. Many candidates made good use of their knowledge of the topic they chose and were able, where appropriate, to fashion a balanced answer to the question.

Quite a few candidates wrote their essays in informal and sometimes colloquial English which did not match the tone of a serious topic. At times this weakened the impact of important statements.

Most candidates used the time wisely and were able to complete both their essays but there was some evidence of second essays being unduly rushed leaving no or insufficient time to conduct a thorough and systematic check of the English.

Introductions should set the scene for the content to come and not ramble on at unnecessary length. Conclusions should not simply list the points in the main body of the essay but should produce a personal view on the particular topic based on the material discussed.

The following points embracing Use of English, essay technique and content are presented in bullet points style in the hope that this will make them more accessible to candidates and therefore easier to remember.

- credit can not be given where very poor handwriting obscures the meaning
- there were very few instances of rubric infringements this year although a number of essays were short (below 375 words) and lost marks for the Use of English, as a result
- candidates need to answer the actual question set and not offload everything they know about a topic area
- several candidates ignored the wording 'in your country' in their responses and wrote too broadly about other places, which was irrelevant

Use of English

Use of English marks can be needlessly lost through basic errors, examples of which are listed below:

- subject/verb non-agreement
- use of informal vocabulary such as 'kinda', 'gotta', 'kids', and 'Right!' as a one word sentence to emphasise a point
- the use of the clichéd phrase 'In a nutshell', usually as the first words of the conclusion, is not appropriate in a formal essay
- missing endings on plural nouns because of carelessness and/or poor checking
- using incorrect plural instead of singular words: electricities, behaviours, informations and technologies instead of electricity, behaviour, information and technology
- the pronoun 'one' can not be followed by 'they'/'their'
- confusion between their/there, to/too, here/hear, crisis/crises
- incorrect use of apostrophes
- incorrect comparative forms such as more easier/more richer/more harder
- words not separated e.g. 'alot' 'infact' 'aswelll'

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Quite a popular choice and usually reasonably well answered. Better answers covered several aspects of discrimination as prompted by the wording of the question and linked these aspects successfully to career choice. The very best answers gave examples of age, gender and/or background playing an all too decisive role in career choice in cases where individuals' qualifications and experience were very similar. Weaker candidates often chose extreme examples which confused discriminatory practices with common sense. Such examples included not allowing teenagers to practise medicine or not employing females and pensioners in jobs requiring considerable physical strength.

Question 2

Not a very popular choice and often not particularly well answered. Most answers focused on sex slavery although areas or countries where this takes place were seldom identified. Other considerations such as child soldiers, cheap labour in 'sweatshops' and 'inferior' women were rarely mentioned.

Question 3

A very popular answer which was often tackled with zeal and enthusiasm. Unfortunately, in many responses the concept of being 'unique' was subject to considerable poetic licence. Some answers revealed a surprising lack of knowledge about other nations in the world suggesting, for example, that freedom and democracy could only be found in one nation. Better answers focused successfully on such qualities as an unusually strong tradition of independence and enterprise, the influential role of religion and the integration of numerous diverse cultures into one society with a common goal.

Question 4

A reasonably popular choice which often produced a well balanced answer weighing individual responsibility against individual freedom of action. Candidates in favour of voting in all elections thought it disrespectful to abstain, given past struggles to attain universal suffrage. The non voters viewed their abstention as a strong message of dissatisfaction with some aspect(s) of the world of politics.

Question 5

Not overly popular and not always well answered. The keywords 'inevitable' and 'desirable' were frequently hardly mentioned and often, completely ignored. Some candidates seemed to suggest that the main reason why few females participate in sport is because they are unable to compete with male attributes such as physical strength and speed. However, they were unable to name any sport where females and males face each other in direct competition.

Question 6

Popular, as might have been expected from the subject matter. The better responses contained very clear views of the pros and cons of using computers in schools. Weaker answers tended to be very one sided, either totally in favour or totally opposed, without mention of any opposing views and often without evidence to consolidate their claims. Smartboards and instant information from the Internet were seen as very positive factors whereas plagiarism and the computer as a 'weapon of mass distraction' were common negatives.

Question 7

Another popular question which attracted opposing views. Many candidates admit to spending a fair amount of time on these networks every day but very few could explain the precise nature of the attraction. They also did not see privacy as an important issue. A small minority hate the whole idea of exposing identity and personal information to strangers and were therefore non-participants. Better answers could indicate why these sites are so popular but were also well aware of the potential dangers of stalking, grooming, identity theft and cyber-bullying. These more cautious network members also knew how to protect themselves via privacy settings.

Question 8

A reasonably popular topic with the vast majority agreeing that testing on animals speeds up the process of bringing new and safe medicines into the marketplace. Therefore it should continue for the foreseeable future. A few candidates objected to testing on monkeys and other animals such as dogs but none of them seemed to mind mice and rats being subjected to pain and death for the sake of humankind

Question 9

Moderately popular and not an easy question to answer unless focused around threat levels. Candidates who saw global warming as the bigger threat tended to be the 'gloom and doom merchants.' They were very assertive but could not produce one shred of concrete evidence or data to prove their claims. They were also unaware that most of the claims and data from the IPCC and similar agencies have, in the meantime, been discredited by eminent climatologists. Some candidates felt terrorism to be the bigger threat as terrorism is happening here and now, whereas any disaster emanating from global warming or climate change was not immanent but rather a possibility at some date in the distant future.

Question 10

Relatively few responses to this question but several thought-provoking essays revealing some maturity of thought were seen. These essays demonstrated the power of faith, when, for example, a loved one dies, to provide comfort and solace in the belief of meeting again in a better place. However, the believers could also understand those of little faith who cannot logically reconcile a compassionate deity with all the cruelty and suffering of various kinds which plagues many corners of our world.

Question 11

Moderately popular and generally quite well attempted. No answer was seen which opposed the retention of handwriting. Arguments for retaining it included continuing tradition, the aesthetic appeal of various styles, particularly copperplate and the 'personal' stamp and style associated with identity. Its ability to form a stronger, more emotionally laden link to the correspondent was identified as was its immediacy which did not rely on any aspect of IT.

Question 12

Not overly popular and not always well done. Quite a few candidates wrote a generalised essay on the advantages of being bilingual or multilingual, particularly regarding career prospects. Others mentioned but rarely developed the access to other cultures without the need for a third party i.e. a translator. The influence on 'your' society was seldom tackled in any depth.

Question 13

Moderately popular. Economic factors such as employment and profits from box office blockbusters seemed to be just as highly valued as national prestige, artistic excellence and cultural identity. Both Hollywood and Bollywood were regarded as huge 'earners' contributing very significantly both to GDP and the revenue of the relevant government. Several candidates also mentioned American pride in developing more advanced cinematic technologies in making such films as Avatar so memorable

Question 14

Quite a popular topic. The standard answer translated 'aspects' into articles (of clothing) and talked of formal suits and tuxedos for men and the much beloved 'little black dress' for the ladies. It also gave examples of fashion that becomes timeless in that items reappear in some guise or other, time and time again. Very few candidates considered aspects of fashion in the sense of feeling confident and comfortable thanks to appearing in appropriately smart clothes for the occasion. They also did not deal with never changing styles often dictated by extreme temperatures and/or religious tradition.

It was surprising that nobody ventured beyond clothes into other realms of consumerism and perhaps into social conduct

Question 15

No response seen