

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/01

Paper 1

General comments

Responses varied widely in the quality of presentation, in the fluency of the English and in the range of content.

More able candidates discussed topics in a logical and systematic fashion. They supported their main points with relevant examples from appropriate local, national and international sources and occasionally included apt quotations for further illustration. Such essays were often perceptive and reflective and demonstrated not only a wide range of general but also, on occasion, specialist knowledge. They were skilled at adapting their knowledge to the specific demands of the question and consequently adhered faithfully to the question with no or only minor digression. They were interesting and engaging to read and offered insights into their own cultural experiences which often widened the scope of the debate. They examined the question from both sides to arrive at a balanced view and then expressed their personal opinion with some conviction.

Many other candidates were able to express themselves reasonably clearly, but were sometimes careless with spelling and were prone to avoidable grammar mistakes. A few candidates were admirably ambitious in their vocabulary and range of expression. However, they sometimes overreached themselves which resulted in wordiness and inappropriate choice of lexis which led to varying degrees of clumsiness and awkwardness in expression. Quotations were often relevant but not always accurate and there was, at times, some doubt as to the authenticity of attributed sources. Some candidates often drew up fairly elaborate plans to shape their essays but did not always follow these plans so that essays tended to ramble and lose focus. Some candidates did not use sufficient exemplification and illustration to support significant points. A considerable number of essays were rather too generalised and lacked balance.

A few contained factually inaccurate information or exaggerated statements, for example, that 'millions were killed in Indonesia in the recent tsunami' or that 'new inventions are being made every second of every day'.

Poorer essays were vague and digressive which often resulted in a lack of real and relevant substance. Candidates paid scant attention to keywords in the questions and tended to write down everything they knew about the topic without tailoring it to the actual question. This resulted in many responses in this category being only marginally relevant or, in some cases, totally irrelevant. Frequently, very little or no illustration was offered as evidence to underline important points. Numerous candidates addressed the question they wanted to answer rather than the precise question, which had been set. Some responses had been obviously prepared but many candidates were unable to adapt their material sufficiently to answer the actual question on the paper.

A few candidates handicapped themselves unnecessarily by not reading the instructions on the question paper properly and infringing the rubric.

Use of time

Many candidates do not make best use of their time. They write overlong preambles instead of setting the scene by means of a clear and concise introduction. Similarly, candidates present conclusions consisting often of simple repetition of points already made with inadequate reference to key points and their own personal views.

Some candidates seem to think that writing at length is a prerequisite for a good mark and often do not concentrate sufficiently on the quality of their content material and of their English.

A minority of candidates mismanage their time and have to rush Essay 2. This has unfortunate negative effects on the quality and the content and accuracy of the English.

It is glaringly obvious that not enough time is spent on the checking of the English. Virtually all candidates, even the very able, make avoidable errors which would be picked up by a focused mechanical check. This does not mean a quick re-read but rather a systematic scrutiny of such elements as spelling, correct tense usage and grammatical agreements. The following examples, which illustrate the need for this process, are all taken from essays written by able candidates who have a good range of vocabulary and expression but are prone to carelessness.

- Females have been praised for their good work and still is.
- They take their phones to School and use it in lessons.
- It encourage employees to work effectively, efficient and creatively.
- One improves their own learning by reading.

All candidates should leave some 15 minutes to undertake this mechanical checking. If carried out with due care and attention, it would improve marks substantially.

Use of English

The standard of English ranged from excellent fluency to a serious lack of command of the language. The academic tone of some essays was sometimes spoilt by jarring and inappropriate colloquial expression such as “Hey guys, does it matter?” This does not mean that colloquial expression is always inadmissible, but it does need to be appropriate to the particular context.

Unfortunately, reasonable content was sometimes hampered by an inadequate grasp of English. Many less successful candidates suffered considerable language difficulties. Their essays contained a plethora of basic errors of all kinds in spelling, grammar and expression. Where the content was better than the English, the impact of the relevant material was often undermined by the inadequate performance in language which made the discussion difficult to follow. In extreme cases, the very low marks scored for English made overall success on this paper virtually impossible to achieve.

It was disappointing to find more than a few candidates misspelling words which actually were printed on the question paper.

Common errors frequently found in essays this year included:

- incorrect use of apostrophes and capital letters
- ‘for example’ often expressed as ‘for e.g.’
- incorrect use of amount/number
- ‘less/fewer’, ‘alternate/alternative’ and ‘there/their’ often incorrectly used
- frequent overuse and misuse of ‘etc.’ (“Researchers spray perfumes, deodorants, air fresheners etc. on rabbits, mice etc. to see how they react etc.”)
- joining up words incorrectly e.g. ‘a lot’, ‘aswell’, ‘infact’, ‘donot’ and ‘along time’.
- ‘according to me’ instead of ‘in my opinion’.

Many of these common errors have been noticed and commented upon in previous reports.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

This question attracted relatively few responses. Candidates showed little evidence of other sources such as archaeology and there was a surprising unawareness of modern technological methods of dating ancient materials. Few could discuss bias or objectivity in any detail but several good answers were seen from more able candidates who focused clearly on “worthwhile” and who could relate interesting accounts of oral history in their respective countries.

Question 2

Fairly popular with candidates. Good responses focused on “How far...afford” and were able to balance the need for companies to make a profit against the costs of health and safety measures to protect the workers. Legal requirements regarding health and safety in both developed and developing countries were successfully contrasted. The differing practices in large multinational corporations and small local firms were also considered in some depth. Examples of very poor or even non-existent health and safety provision were given, for example, in firms weaving carpets by hand often employing children in unacceptable conditions. Poorer answers did not consider “afford” at all. Health and safety was often interpreted as company provision for life and medical insurance, fringe benefits and family welfare. Maslow was often quoted by candidates of Business Studies with motivation of workers being given undue prominence as was the role of the personnel department.

Question 3

Not very popular and generally not well answered. The majority of candidates discussed equal opportunities for women in a superficial manner. They often described alleged female characteristics, for example, of loving care and compassion, which they felt could heal much of the conflict in the world. Hardly any examples of female politicians were mentioned although a few candidates failed to realise that Princess Diana and Queen Elizabeth were not politicians. The relatively few good answers did pay tribute to the achievements of figures such as Benazir Bhutto and Indira Gandhi, but then observed that their successes were probably a result of personal ability rather than gender qualities.

Question 4

A very popular question. Many candidates established the link between the pace of life and the seemingly increasing popularity of fast food outlets but some simply discussed positive and negative aspects of fast food in general without mentioning the pace of modern life. However, the accelerated pace of life, when considered, was often exaggerated to the bounds of credibility with the clear inference that the choice for many exhausted workers was between fast food and starvation. There were too many unbalanced answers where fast food was either highly praised for its almost instant accessibility, delicious taste and cheapness or alternatively, condemned as junk food which caused obesity, health problems and even death in many people across the world.

Better answers did not limit fast food to McDonalds, Burger King and similar outlets but considered also the full range of convenience foods. They did not take extreme unbalanced views but considered the arguments that fast food could be a useful alternative for many when time is restricted and is therefore an acceptable product of our times. As regards health issues, they made a clear distinction between virtually living off fast foods (“Super size me”) and enjoying infrequent visits to the outlets. Some candidates considered quite carefully how fast food was eroding the place of traditional cuisine, especially amongst young people.

Question 5

Moderately popular. Most examples were taken from recent earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and the Asian tsunami. “Always” was overlooked by the vast majority and there was little reference to personal crises and to the Role played by the United Nations, WHO and international charities. Better essays discriminated clearly between predicted and unexpected crises with regard to response times.

Section 2

Question 6

There were few answers to this. There was little discussion on animal rights, and virtually no reference to the enforcement of legal restrictions or alternative ways of testing. A small number of emotive answers stressed the torture and murder of animals but there was universal condemnation of using animals for the testing of cosmetics. Many felt that using animals for testing was acceptable if clear benefits for human beings ensued. Only the more able noticed that research need not involve physical pain or damage and that research programmes could be for the animals' benefit.

Question 7

Very popular. Poor responses rambled on about the benefits of technology, particularly computers, without linking them meaningfully to the question. There was also doubt as to what constitutes "modern" technology. Candidates could usually provide plausible reasons for youngsters embracing and being excited by technology but were far less surefooted about the attitudes of older people. Few dealt convincingly with "threatened" but tended to interpret it as non-acceptance without offering valid reasons. There was general acceptance of the premise in the question but better responses did give examples of older people coping well with the Internet, mobile phones and medical aids.

Question 8

Very popular. Most candidates were fully aware that fossil fuels will soon run out and that alternatives are needed. Weaker candidates did not consider energy saving possibilities and did not discuss the social, economic and environmental conditions which are pressuring change. They listed wind, water and solar energy superficially, without considering their cost and capability of replacing traditional energy providers. Essays were not well illustrated, and there were generally poor levels of awareness and debate on nuclear energy with a lack of understanding and factual information about the meltdown in Chernobyl. Better answers balanced the debate between the reasons for and the assessment of alternatives already available or still under development from the national and global viewpoint.

Question 9

Reasonably popular. Many were concerned about disease moving across the continents but weaker candidates did not say enough about the agents responsible for its spread. Limited reference was made to the work of WHO and NGOs and to pre-emptive measures to control epidemics and, indeed, pandemics. Stronger candidates did not restrict themselves to Aids and bird flu. They demonstrated good knowledge of international initiatives and campaigns to halt the progress of such 'older' diseases as cholera, malaria and typhoid and were aware of the financial implications for participating countries. They also stressed the need for global concern in an age where the movement of people around the world is constantly increasing. There was some good illustration of how SARS was contained through national and international measures.

Question 10

Not overly popular. A few candidates mistakenly saw this question as an attack on the arts. Many candidates did not go beyond the practical uses of being numerate in daily life and the acknowledgement that a good knowledge of maths was a *sine qua non* for success in subjects such as the natural sciences, accountancy and business studies. Education was often narrowly interpreted as the means for gaining a qualification to secure well-paid employment. Only a small number of more able candidates were able to transcend this superficiality and show how, for example, computers, their software, digital technology and a range of problem-solving skills and logical analyses are deeply rooted in advanced mathematical principles.

Section 3

Question 11

Surprisingly only moderately popular. Weaker answers lacked balance and overemphasised the intrusion of the tabloid press and the antics of the paparazzi. Princess Diana's death in an underpass in Paris figured prominently amongst the examples. Some did not understand "probe" and consequently, missed the point. The media's "right" was not always tackled. Better candidates referred to the watchdog role of the media including investigative journalism and consumer advice programmes. They also realised that some people deliberately court publicity, whether good or bad, to keep their names in the public eye, thus cementing their celebrity status.

Question 12

Reasonably popular. More able candidates waxed lyrically about the joys and pleasures of reading and were able to offer apt examples in evidence. Many candidates, however, simply listed the alleged benefits of reading such as extending vocabulary and sharpening writing skills. Unfortunately, some essays were couched in very poor English which undermined their own assertions. Few good examples were offered to substantiate points. Reading was often limited to school books and advertisements on billboards and in newspapers. Some acknowledged the importance of reading but argued, not always convincingly, that it was only one of a multitude of important daily activities and therefore maintained that days with no reading were far from wasted.

Question 13

The great majority were in agreement with the premise. There were many fairly superficial answers asserting that Internet cafes were modern and therefore good, whereas museums were antiquated like their contents and therefore boring. Too many answers focused on the Internet itself rather than Internet cafes and had little idea of the functions and value of museums. Better candidates saw no reason to prefer one to the other. They felt that Internet cafes and museums should fulfil a complementary role. They also argued that information gleaned from museum curators was likely to be more reliable than some material on the Internet and that seeing and possibly touching artefacts was likely to leave a more memorable impression than looking at images on screen. The social role of Internet cafes was acknowledged, as was its role in developing countries of offering Internet access to the poorer sectors of the population. It was also acknowledged that the maintenance and development of museums in developing countries was understandably not a foremost priority.

Question 14

Not very popular. Those who tackled it usually struggled to answer it, and this was probably the least effectively answered of all the questions on the paper as regards provision of substantial content. Answers were desperately short on examples of significant painters and their work; virtually no examples of photographers were given. Some paintings were attributed to the wrong artists and there was vast underestimation of the skills of top professional photographers. A mere handful of more able candidates discussed the wide range of traditional painting skills and styles which have made painting unique and have contributed to the rarity and economic value placed on iconic examples. They also understood that photography could be very creative, especially with the advent of digital imaging.

Question 15

Relatively few candidates were able to forge a strong link between religion and vital aspects of culture and life. They were unable to contemplate a moral, upright life without practising a formal religion although stronger candidates realised that generally acceptable social interaction often has its roots in religion. Weaker candidates tended to concentrate on the personal discipline and social cohesiveness implicit in following a religious faith and neglect the wider cultural dimension affected by observance, ritual and festive celebrations. Stronger candidates referred to religious expression in literature and architecture and to the negative impact of extremist views. They also discussed the spread of secularism and atheism which did not necessarily impact negatively on culture and life.